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*The Production and Reception of gender-
based content in Pakistani Television Culture*

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DPhil Thesis

University of Sussex

(June 2015)

Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted, either in the same or in a different form, to this or any other university for a degree.

Signature:.....

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University of Sussex

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Doctor of Philosophy

The Production and Reception of gender-based content in Pakistani Television Culture

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the production and reception of gender-based content in Pakistani television culture. The guiding research question asks how and why such content changed since the 'liberalisation' of the media landscape since 2002, and how have women appropriated this content?

Gendered television content changed in the post-liberalisation period with the highlighting of controversial issues such as honour killings, rape, adultery, the violation of women's divorce rights, and the subjugation of women in the extended family system. Drawing from theoretical debates on the concepts of publics, the public sphere and cultural citizenship, I argue that these popular cultural spaces can be read in terms of an emerging feminist public sphere where women can engage as members of the public and as cultural citizens.

Based on the data produced from 40 interviews with producers, the study illuminates the agendas and motivations - both commercial and ideological - in producing gendered content. The evidence suggests that controversial issues related to gender deliver ratings if in line with *Shariah*; issues that explicitly clash with *Shariah* (homosexuality in particular) do not feature.

To explore how women appropriate this gendered content, I conducted 32 focus groups among women of different ages and classes in Karachi. This research reveals how engagement with this content allows viewers to revisit their intersecting identities as Muslims, women and Pakistanis. The viewers in the lower middle class read this content as Muslims first, and then as women. However, those in the middle class revisit the content in relation to their national identity. This thesis offers an original and comprehensive insight into the production and reception of the gender-based television in Pakistan, and in so doing, makes a fresh contribution to the study of gender, media and culture in Muslim societies.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	9
1.1 Rationale for the research	12
1.2 Evolution of the media landscape in Pakistan	14
1.3 Scope of the study	21
1.4 The Public/private distinction in Pakistani society	27
1.5 Gendered citizenship in Pakistan	31
1.6 Overview of the Chapters	33
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework	38
2.1 Introduction	39
2.2 <u>Audiences and Publics and Cultural Citizens</u>	39
2.2.1 Looking for the term in the local language (<i>Urdu</i>)	39
2.2.2 Defining the terms	40
2.2.3 Understanding the concept of 'public' through attributes	41
2.2.4 Relevance of the concept of cultural citizenship to the project	50
2.3 Rearticulating the notion of the public sphere	53
2.4 Understanding the dynamics of the popular culture	60
2.4.1: Popular culture as the reflection of the public sphere	61
2.4.2: Popular culture and the emotional expression	63
2.5 A political economy perspective on media consumption	65
2.6 Conclusion	70

<u>Chapter 3: Methodology</u>	71
3.1 Introduction	71
3.2 Interviews	72
3.3 Focus groups	82
3.3.1 Overview of the groups in Lower Middle Class	88
3.3.2 Overview of the groups in Middle Class	89
3.4 Transcribing Data	91
3.5 Ethical Question	92
3.6 Conclusion	94
 <u>Chapter 4: Openness in gender-based content</u>	 95
4.1: Recalling PTV	97
4.2: Losing Modesty/Abandoning <i>Dupatta</i>	104
4.3: <i>Openness</i> in the gender-based content: Consequences for the home and lounge	113
4.4: Glorifying/highlighting gender-based taboos: is it about vulgarizing content?	123
4.5: Conclusion	135
 <u>Chapter 5: Understanding Production of the gender-based content</u>	 137
5.1 Recalling PTV	137
5.2 Perception of the producers about their viewers	144
5.3 The trend of seeking better ratings	153
5.4 Importance of sellable/selling factor in any gendered content	164
5.5 Where does the actual power lie/who has the actual control over gendered content?	167
5.6: Whether media organizations are similar to the institutions/mediated public sphere with inherent sense of commitment/responsibility towards public	174

5.7 Conclusion	180
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Chapter 6: Empowering women through gendered content: Producers' perspective **182**

6.1: Drama serials: Empowering viewers?	183
6.1.1: Content Heads' perspective on potential of drama serials in bringing change	188
6.1.2: Directors/producers perspective on drama serials in bringing change	192
6.2: Breakfast shows: Empowering/bringing change on producers' agenda?	208
6.3: Producers of gender issue-based talk shows: Empowering/bringing change on producers' agenda?	219
6.4: Conclusion	233

Chapter 7: Women Empowered or disciplined through gendered content? **235**

7.1: Patterns of engagement with emancipatory trends in drama serials	235
7.2: Viewers' engagement patterns with religion and social issue-based talk shows	262
7.3: Viewers' patterns of engagement with breakfast shows	270
7.4: Viewers' engagement patterns with crime shows	276
7.5: Conclusion	289

Chapter 8: Conclusion **291**

8.1 Summary of the findings of the chapters	293
8.2 Revisiting the attributes of the public	300
8.3: Revisiting the utility of popular culture and cultural citizenship	303
8.4 Revisiting the concept of the public sphere	305
8.5 Revisiting methodology: Lessons learnt	307
8.6 Looking into the future	309
8.7 The project of emancipation for Pakistani women	310

Bibliography **313-330**

Appendices **331 -344**

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is driven by a single over-arching research question: *why has the content in relation to gender changed so dramatically in Pakistani television since 'liberalisation' and how do women engage with and make sense of this changed content?*

For those who remember Pakistani television before the liberalisation policy of 2000, it is difficult *not* to have noticed the change in gender-based content in the post-liberalisation era. Television producers have used drama serials to engage with gender specific issues, and have incorporated new genres to entertain and inform gendered audiences. There are programmes that raise awareness on gender issues in a serious manner, and others that highlight such issues in an entertaining way. In this context, gendered television content on cable television networks has three defining features. First, it is about the renegotiation of the relationship between the public and the private realm. Second, it grants its audiences access to the mediated public sphere without dislocating them from the privacy of their homes. Third, it opens up spaces for practising cultural citizenship, which can have consequences for their female citizenry within Pakistan.

Despite the phenomenal growth of television in Pakistan, and very apparent rise of this new content, there has been no in-depth study to date to account for why television producers felt the need to introduce new genres dealing specifically with the gender-based content; nor has there been much academic attention paid to the question of how Pakistani women feel about this new wave of content in Pakistani television.

In order to redress this situation and to answer the central research question, the research objectives for this study are:

- To identify the *change* in Pakistani television cultures in relation to the gender-based content.
- To examine the role/underlying motives of the producers in bringing about the *change* in Pakistani television.
- To examine how Pakistani women engage with and make sense of the *change* in gender-related content.
- To understand whether the *change* in gender-based content can have the potential to empower women in any way.

The phrase ‘change in content in relation to gender’ needs careful consideration at this stage. In the pre-liberalisation era, gender issues did not have the same space in television broadcasting as they have now. Historically, there have been programmes on the awareness of certain gender-related issues such as family planning, but the producers would not touch the controversial topics which are considered to be the taboos of the Pakistani society.¹ From 2002, there has been

¹ In pre-liberalisation era, Pakistani television raised issues of family planning, narcotics and AIDS, but would not go as far as to highlight the controversial issues in relation to gender. Similarly, the genres in PTV that highlighted these issues were either the drama serials or the tele-awareness campaigns on family planning which would run for five minutes before news.

a distinct *change* and practices such as woman's marriage to the Holy Quran², incest, honour killings (*karo kari*)³, stoning to death, adultery, remarriage after divorce, domestic violence, marriages of minors and homosexuality, rights of women living in the joint families⁴ have been raised in the news, religious programmes, drama serials, talk shows and breakfast shows. The inclusion of such issues in the gender-based content makes television very different from what it was a decade ago; therefore I refer to it as the *change* in content related to gender. In this study, I will exclude any other content that does not reflect this *change*. This thesis will focus solely on the kind of content that was not available before the liberalisation era, in both serious and entertainment programming. This change in content operates at two levels; firstly in terms of gender-related issues that had not thus far been discussed on television and secondly, in terms of giving access to the mediated public sphere via the new interactive genre of the talk show. In the post-liberalisation era, it is difficult *not* to spot the *change* in gender-based content. The producers have not only used drama serials to offer gender specific issues, but have also incorporated new genres to entertain and inform gendered audiences. There are programmes which are exclusively based on the awareness of gender issues in a serious manner, and then there are other programmes which highlight such issues in an

² Marriage to Quran is also known as *Haq Bakhshish*. Women in rural Sindh, can be married to Quran, that is, they spend their life reading and memorising Quran, than being married off to a prospective groom of some other tribe. It is a common practice in rural Sindh to deny women the right of marriage outside their tribe. Usually, male members of the family, especially brothers force their sisters into such arrangements to retain their share in the family property that they acquire through law of inheritance.

³ *Karo kari*, an expression that means "black man, black woman", is used to describe couples engaged in illicit relations' (22). Cited in Pope, N. (2012)

⁴ Joint Family System (JFS) comprises of two or more nuclear families that form a corporate economic unit'. (Levinson D, Malone MJ, Brown (1980) quoted in Taqui, Itrat, Quadri 2007) I would also add that in case of Pakistan, joint family system refers to an arrangement of living where elderly parents live with their children and children's families.

entertaining way. Therefore, my emphasis is on the treatment and approach towards addressing a particular kind of content (that I call gender-based) across the interactive formats and the narrative form.

In this chapter, I will describe the broad context for the research in terms of the prevailing gender politics and media culture in Pakistan, and against the tensions between a liberalisation agenda in the media and the rise of religious conservatism. At the end, I will also provide the overview of the chapters.

1.1 Rationale for the research:

This research is particularly important for it raises questions about how to revisit our traditional understandings of the public/private distinction in the Pakistani society. The liberalisation of the media has coincided with the rise of religiosity in the society. When I explored the gender-based content in Pakistani television culture, I identify two contradictory waves in this content: one that transcends the silence on gender-based violence in the name of culture and religion, and another that seeks the answer to these issues in the name of religion. By that, I clearly mean that liberalisation in content is about 'change' in terms of issues that were not discussed before but it is also about 'not change' where resolution to all issues is found in religion. In this sense, liberalisation has triggered a religious conservatism in content.

In Islamic societies, the participation of women as active citizens is restricted. This restricted participation of women in the public realm is largely a consequence of some of the religious influences in Muslim societies: the orthodox interpretation of Islam does not allow women to access the public domain on their own terms. In the case of Pakistan, there are multiple factors at play which compel women to display a certain form of social behaviour. Women in Pakistan are required to conform to strong regional customs as well

as strict religious practices. Issues related to morality and sexuality are not only guarded under the state law and the Islamic code (*Shariah*), but also through customs. Citizens pick and choose from these three systems according to their own subjectivities. For instance, so-called 'honour killings' is the practice that falls into customs. Women's right to choose their partner for marriage falls both under the customs as well as the *Shariah*. The right of a woman to divorce, and her choice to live in a nuclear family system, again fall under her rights in *Shariah* while living in a joint family system is rooted in culture. Throughout the thesis, the right of nuclear home versus the tradition of living in a joint family system will also emerge as one of the prominent themes. This can also be seen in terms of rights of daughters-in-law (younger women) versus the rights of older women (mothers-in-law).

I do not mean to generalise this scenario by stating that all women have limited access to the public sphere or that there are hardly any women who are free to struggle against the religious and cultural practices that discriminate against women in Pakistan. In fact, it is clear that Pakistani women do not form a homogenous whole with the same aspirations for identical social behaviour. Nor does Pakistan have a single form of feminism that represents all Pakistani women (See for example, Mumtaz: 2005).

With the liberalisation of media in 2000, television content in relation to gender started opening a public discussion on gender-based issues in Pakistani society. The policy of liberalisation represented a revolution in national television culture; it was not just about the rise of national, cable and satellite television channels, competing for sponsors and audiences, but also about a transformation of the content. With an altogether new feel to the content, the new television culture simply redefined the viewing experiences of the audiences in Pakistan. Mapping this change in the Pakistani television culture and how it is seen by its viewers is a complex task. This thesis addresses that

task in three ways: I identify the change in the gender-based content of Pakistani television; I examine the motivation and agendas of the producers in bringing this change; and, finally I seek to explore how this content is appropriated by viewers based in Karachi. In case of producers, I interview people on the creative side of production (such as writers, directors, content heads and anchors) and also on the marketing side of production (such as channel heads, heads of sales and marketing divisions and business unit heads). In this regard, the focus is on two genres: drama serials and talk shows (the latter includes shows with gender and or religious themes, including the popular breakfast talk shows and crime talk shows; but all share an interactive format and feature similar content).

1.2: Evolution of the media landscape in Pakistan:

Before the liberalisation of television in 2000, Pakistan had one terrestrial channel, the Pakistan Television Corporation's channel, commonly known as PTV, which had been the state broadcaster since 1964. As the state broadcaster, content on PTV reflected the policies of different governments. In case of news, the state channel is used as the mouth piece of the government with hardly any screen space to the opposition parties. But with regards to the gendered representation on screen, it is observed that the liberal governments relaxed the control on content (women can be seen without *dupatta*⁵) while the religiously inclined governments brought in their own agendas with restrictions on appearance of women such as the *dupatta* policy⁶ (See for example, Ali, 1986, Suleman, 1999, Kothari, 2005 and Nasir, 2012).

⁵ *Dupatta* is stole of 2.5 metres long worn with the national dress

⁶ A policy under which women were supposed to cover their heads on screen. Although people refer to this policy in the industry but, in PTV, no one could provide me with an official document on this policy.

From 1964 to early 1990s, Pakistani viewers could only watch one television channel owned by the government. In the early 1990s, the Pakistani government had begun to relax its control over the broadcasting culture in Pakistan, by allowing Network Television Marketing (NTM) to launch as the first-ever private channel. This was an entertainment channel, known for music, celebrity anchors and drama serials. After three years of broadcasting, the channel suspended its services, but it left a craving for a liberal media among its viewers (PEMRA, 2009).

In 1998 the Kargil war⁷ was also instrumental in drawing people towards buying satellite dishes mainly because the official version of the war was not enough for the citizens of Pakistan (Khan and Joseph: 2008). In this regard, Crabtree (2009) claims that Pakistanis, ‘in desperation bought illegal satellite dishes, tuning in to Indian television during the war’. Through dishes, Pakistanis could not only watch foreign news channels but also Indian entertainment channels. But soon the popularity of satellite television’ was eclipsed by a thriving cable industry that was cheaper and easily accessible in Pakistan’s cities and small towns’ (Proffitt and Rasul, 2013: 598). At the time, Pakistani viewers were also tuning in to the Indian channels specifically Star Plus to watch daily soaps, a genre alien to Pakistani viewers. Indian channels were becoming readily available through cable operators and the stories were based on issues facing joint-family households. The narratives were also somewhat liberal for Pakistani society with extra-marital affairs as one of the central themes.

⁷ The Kargil War (May 1999) was an armed conflict between India and Pakistan, along the Line of Control (LoC), in the Kargil district of Kashmir.

In the same period from 1997 – 1999, on the political front, the Pakistani government proposed implementing the *Shariah*, which was followed by a *coup d'etat* led by General Musharraf on October 12, 1999. By 1999, Pakistan had become vulnerable to several challenges at home and at the global level. At the same time, Pakistan became an ally of the US in the 'war on terror', which was followed by the mushrooming of extremist elements in the society. The radical elements such as Al-Qaeda and Taliban gained prominence in the province of Pakhtunkhwa and Federally Administered Areas of Pakistan only to gain further hold in the cities. Amidst these crises, the country needed a strong media-base to reflect a softer image of Pakistan at the global level. Pakistan needed a television culture of its own, different from PTV's culture and similar or better than what was offered at the time, by other foreign satellite channels (including Indian news channels). It was also the time when the Cold War had ended and as globalisation escalated, Pakistanis could access information not only through satellite channels but also through the Internet.

In 2002, the Independent Media Corporation launched its channel Geo News from Pakistan followed by other networks. Their direct competitor was not PTV but foreign satellite channels. Since the military regime had already legalised cable television operations in 2000, the government welcomed the proliferation of new channels. The new private channels launched in the subsequent decade reflect a strong television culture characterised by distinctiveness in its content, and free from the direct influence of the government. However, there is still a code of conduct for these channels. Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was founded on March 1, 2002 for issuing licences and suspending services in case of violation of its charter⁸. In the last 15 years,

⁸ See for example: Code of Conduct for Media Broadcasters or Cable TV Operators, Available at: http://www.pemra.gov.pk/pemra/images/docs/legislation/Code_of_Conduct.pdf (Accessed: 3 June, 2014)

PEMRA has issued 91 licenses out of which 50 are entertainment channels and 35 news and current affair channels. (PEMRA Report 2010-2014)⁹.

There are five media groups that have monopoly over Pakistani media industry, including electronic and print media. These include Independent Media Corporation, Pakistan Herald Publications Limited, ARY Group, Waqt Group, and Lakson Group. (See for example Rasul and McDowell, 2012) Interestingly, it was observed that these media houses also took advantage of the post 9/11 scenario, and clearly took sides with either the Islamist elements or the state. As an ally on War on Terror, Musharraf's government was considered pro-American. In this scenario, private media emerged 'as an informal power player in Pakistan's domestic politics'. (Hassan, 2014: 66) 'The anti-Americanism of the political parties inclined them to side with the extremist clergy on television, thus reinforcing the Islamisation of the electronic media' (Ahmed, 2006, cited in Hassan, 2014: 74). In this regard, the role of PEMRA is also controversial, and the content of Pakistani cable channels is regulated under PEMRA mostly when content explicitly challenges not just religion but also the state (the armed forces in particular) and the judiciary¹⁰. There have been instances in the post-liberalisation era where the transmissions of certain channels have been suspended for challenging and criticising the government (Walsh, D. 2007; Reporters without Borders, 2010). At times, political parties also force cable operators to suspend their services or the sitting government influences the content of certain private channels.¹¹ If PEMRA does not take into account content

⁹ See for example, (2014) PEMRA Report (2010-2014), Available at: http://115.186.57.67/images/docs/pub-rep/PEMRA_REPORT_2014/index.html, (Accessed: 19 April, 2015)

¹⁰ Boone, J. (2014) Geo TV Owners print front-page apology to Pakistan's ISI spy chief, *The Guardian*, [Online] May 26, Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/26/geo-tv-front-page-apology-pakistan-isi-spy-chief-zaheer-ul-islam> (Accessed 3 June, 2014)

¹¹ (2005) Karachi: MQM makes cable TV to go off air, *Dawn* [Online] August 19, Available on: <http://www.dawn.com/news/152787/karachi-mqm-makes-cable-tv-to-go-off-air>, Accessed: April 26, 2015

that is objectionable to a set of viewers, then pressure groups such as religion-based parties, independent clergy, and even influential citizens take to the streets to protest or file complaints.

Likewise, on May 20, 2014, Geo TV's licence has been suspended on the charge of airing blasphemous content in one of the breakfast shows.¹² There is also an increase in the moral policing of the media landscape in the recent years. In one of the recent studies on the journalistic culture, Pintak and Nazir (2013) also note that the overall approach of the journalists "is a synthesis of Western practices and the development journalism of Southeast Asia: objective but respectful, independent but cooperative . . . this approach is, in part, expressed within the idiom of Islam" (2013: 662). In this regard, I would argue that the policy of liberalisation has coincided with rising religiosity in Pakistan. Therefore, the policy of liberalisation should not be confused with complete freedom of expression in Pakistani television culture, rather liberal as compared to the content on PTV.

It is also important to note how policies in relation to gender changed with either the change in government, or change in the society. During Zia's Islamist government (1979-88), several initiatives were taken at the state-level to restrict freedom of expression in popular culture. This was the first time when the *dupatta* policy was introduced in relation to appearance of women on screen (Kothari, 2005: 291). In his second tenure (1997-1999), as prime minister of Pakistan, Mian Nawaz Sharif again enforced the conservative *dupatta*/scarf policy on PTV. At the time, television in Pakistan had to face multiple restrictions besides this, including ones on the depiction of performing arts,

¹² See for example: Sunni Ittehad Council issues fatwa against Geo (2014) *The Express Tribune* [Online], Available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/709110/sunni-ittihad-council-issues-fatwa-against-geo/> (Accessed: August 3, 2014)

popular culture and western attire (See for example, Ali, 1986; Kothari, 2005; Nasir, 2012). It was the second time in PTV's history that any government had imposed such a restriction on the appearance of female actors and hosts. It was also the first attempt to impose a *Shariah*-led policy on women's representation on television (Blood, 1994: 243).

In 2004, the MMA (a coalition of religious parties that were part of the Opposition in Parliament, 2002-2007) launched an 'anti-obscenity campaign for the protection of women, which their youth-wing (*Shabab-e-Milli*) claimed was a feminist act'. (Brohi, 2006: 71 quoted in Zia, 2009: 91) At the time, MMA was the ruling party in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, and it proposed a 'Prohibition of Indecent Advertisements Bill 2005', that 'would make publishing indecent and humiliating advertisements a criminal offence' (Zia, 2009: 91). As part of this campaign, the activists would deface the images of women on billboards all over the country. Such campaigns were launched in the name of protection of women from objectification. In this regard, I would argue that there may be no official policy in relation to appearance of women on screen but other pressure groups (such as religion-based parties) have gained strength in the post-liberalisation period. In 2012, in response to a petition filed by the religious parties, the Supreme Court directed the PEMRA to define obscenity and vulgarity on media. This was the first move towards including a definition of obscenity in the PEMRA laws as there was no precedent definition in the Constitution of Pakistan.¹³ Only recently in August 2012, ex-chairman of Jamaat-e-Islami (political party) filed a petition in the Apex Court against vulgarity and obscenity on screen, which was taken up by the Chief Justice who then advised PEMRA to redefine obscenity on screen in Pakistani context. This issue was later directed towards the Parliament and Council for Islamic Ideology (as the

¹³ See for example: Pemra set to define obscenity (2012), *The Express Tribune* [Online] Available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/425719/pemra-set-to-define-obscenity/> (Accessed: August 3, 2014)

principal stakeholders) to define 'obscurity'; however, other terms that were also raised in this debate were vulgar and immoral programming. In these debates to define obscenity, PEMRA declared that 'any content which is unacceptable while viewing with the family transpires obscenity'¹⁴, but there was a clear divide in opinion among the conservatives and the liberal stakeholders. While the liberal participants were of the view that it was impossible to abstract Pakistani television from the foreign influence and that the understanding of obscenity had also changed over a period of time, the conservatives sought to define obscenity in the light of the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*.

This issue remains pending in the Parliament for there is no consensus on how to approach the matter, but what is interesting to note here is that even members of secular and liberal parties have expressed concern on how Indian content has corrupted Pakistani television, referring to the free viewing of Indian channels, and borrowing from Indian content. However, no such attempt has thus far been made to set limits for obscene content on Indian soaps. New to this media ecology are the Turkish soaps dubbed into Urdu that run on several Pakistani entertainment channels. Only recently, the United Producers Association (UPA) has criticised PEMRA for its double standards towards foreign content under which it allows a greater liberty in terms of what can be shown on Turkish soaps (intimate scenes) than on a local channel where similar content is deemed obscene (Mahmood, 2012)¹⁵ Still, within this media ecology, religion is by far the strongest of all factors to influence the context of production and reception. Therefore, I have approached the production and reception of

¹⁴ Council of Ideology, Parliament to define 'obscurity' for media (2012) *The Express Tribune* [Online] August 27, Available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/426935/council-of-islamic-ideology-parliament-to-define-obscurity-for-media/> (Accessed: July 5, 2014).

¹⁵ Mahmood, R. (2012) Are Turkish soaps really a challenge for Pakistani Industry, *The Express Tribune* [Online], December 21, Available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/482374/turkish-dream-local-nightmare/> (Accessed: April, 20, 2014)

gender-based content in relation to this social environment in which religious conservatism is gaining strength by the day.

1.3 Scope of the study:

This research brings together a number of inter-related concerns and so draws on a range of sources and methodologies. It explores and builds on the traditions of reception studies, studies of gender-related content in national television cultures, the public sphere theory, as well as feminist media research. It is a comprehensive study that would seek to understand this significant 'change' in Pakistan's television culture by focussing on producers, texts *and* audiences. Based in the ethnographic tradition of research, this study will be the first one that addresses the dynamics of production and reception in Pakistani television culture. On the production side, the thesis provides original data not only from those on the creative side of the production (writers, directors and the content heads), but also from the sales and marketing side (head of sales and marketing and the channel heads). It gives a thorough insight into the system and the agendas through which the encoding of gender-based content works. The interviews with selected groups of housewives in Karachi also provide new insights into the factors that influence the moment of reception. It also offers an insight into women's subjectivities at a particular moment in Pakistani history (when media have liberalised) and it traces how their subjectivities impact upon their political agency. This moment is crucial in opening research into the area of television studies, especially at a time when social media has become popular. The study, therefore considers how television is still relevant for a certain demographic group in Pakistan.

Pakistan is currently facing multiple challenges, particularly in relation to gender-based issues. According to Thomson Reuters Foundation, in 2011,

Pakistan was ranked third in the world in the list of dangerous countries for women.¹⁶ Karachi, where I conducted the fieldwork for this project, is also considered to be one of the most dangerous cities of the world.¹⁷ It is the financial capital of Pakistan and 'a third largest city in the world by population within city limits' (World Population Review, 2014)¹⁸. The socio-political dynamics of this city are far more complicated than any other urban city in Pakistan. It is a melting pot for all ethnicities in Pakistan including Urdu speaking migrants from India, Pashtuns from KPK, Punjabis from the province of Punjab, Kashmiris from Azad Kashmir to even a small minority of Arabs being trained in madrassas in Karachi (Burki, S. J, 2004)¹⁹. Militant groups such as Taliban also have a stronghold in the city. These groups are also said to be involved in land grabbing, killing of police officers and minority groups, kidnapping and extortion (See for example, Rehman and Walsh, 2014)²⁰. This increased presence of Taliban in the city of Karachi is often known as Talibanisation of the city, a term that gained currency when Musharraf was in power. (See for example, BBC, March, 21 2013) But, Karachi is also home to several other parties such as Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaaz (JSQM). MQM and Jeay Sindh are linguistically and ethnically motivated parties while Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) is a religion-based party. Armed clashes among these parties, target killings and land grabbing have also become a norm

¹⁶ See for example: Pakistan ranks third on the list of most dangerous countries for women, (2011) *The Express Tribune* [Online], 15 June, available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/189294/pakistan-ranks-3rd-on-list-of-most-dangerous-countries-for-women/> (Accessed: August 3, 2014)

¹⁷ PTI (2013), Karachi world's most dangerous mega-city, *The Times of India* [Online], Available at: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/Karachi-worlds-most-dangerous-megacity-Report/articleshow/22437484.cms>, (Accessed: May 4, 2015)

¹⁸ Karachi Population 2015 (2014) World Population Review [Online], 19 October, Available at: <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/karachi-population/>, Accessed: 03 May, 2015

¹⁹ Burki, Shahid, J. (2004) Karachi: a unique mega city, *Dawn* [Online] October, 5, available at: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1066535/dawn-opinion-05-october-2004#1>, (Accessed: 04 May, 2015)

²⁰ Rehman, Z and Walsh, D. (2014) killings Rise in Karachi as Taliban Target Police, New York Times, August 11 [Online] available at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/12/world/asia/killings-rise-in-karachi-as-taliban-target-police.html?_r=0, Accessed: March 16, 2015

for the city.²¹ It is no wonder that in 2013, Karachi was termed the most dangerous megacity in the world.²²

The fieldwork of this study was conducted in areas dominated by Urdu speakers. Originally from India, an Urdu speaking community migrated to Pakistan at the time of Partition. The community is either referred to as the Urdu speaking community of Pakistan or the *muhajir* (migrant) community. The Muhajir community is largely settled in Karachi and Hyderabad in the province of Sindh; this is a minority group in Pakistan. More than 80 per cent of the participants in this research were Urdu speaking with housewives living in joint family systems with no direct access to the public sphere except through media or male guardians.

This thesis is therefore a timely intervention into the debates on gender based issues and women rights in particular. I would also argue that through its cultural specificity, this thesis will enrich the debates in Western literature on publics and cultural citizenship. The study utilises the concepts of publics and cultural citizens and attempts to contextualise it for Pakistan with a particular reference to television. It explores how model of the public sphere can be read in terms of Muslim societies. It will also makes a fresh addition to the rich tradition of feminist media studies, particularly the early feminist works on soap opera. Much important feminist work has been focused on the soap opera by Tania Modleski (1982), Ien Ang (1985), Hobson (1989) and Andrea Press (1991). Although soap operas are different to the genres studied in this thesis,

²¹ (2013) How the Taliban gripped Karachi, BBC News [Online], available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21343397>, Accessed on March 16, 2014

²² (2013) US Magazine terms Karachi 'most dangerous megacity' in the world, The Epress Tribune [Online], September, 8, available at, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/601668/us-magazine-terms-karachi-most-dangerous-megacity-in-the-world/>, Accessed on: Mach 16, 2014.

Also, see for example, (2012) Extreme World: Karachi one of the most violent cities in world, The Express Tribune [Online] September, 10, available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/434413/extreme-world-karachi-one-of-the-most-violent-cities-in-the-world/>, accessed on March 16, 2014

there are still some overlaps in the themes and especially in terms of methodology.

Hobson (1994), for example, discusses soap opera with a group of six women and as a result makes the argument that viewers are not passive (1994: 166). She identifies various themes in the viewers' responses. The first she calls 'pleasure at work', referring to the post-viewing discussions of the viewers at their workplaces. The second she refers to as British realism, the third as the myth of the passive viewer, while the special knowledge of the other culture is a fourth. Hobson concludes that viewers for the soap opera are 'in a superior position to the producers, because the topic is the everyday life of the characters' (1994: 167). More significantly for the purposes of this thesis, she notes how viewing television, and soap operas in particular, goes beyond the moment of reception. 'It indicates that a further stage of communication takes place when they talk about television programs and often the relating of those programs to the everyday life of the viewers' (1994: 167). Hobson's study highlighted the realism prominent in British soaps and how viewers read soaps in relation to their own personal experiences.

Following Hobson, this study explores how female viewers in Pakistan read themes according to their subjective positions. It will also explore how female viewers discuss the content beyond the moment of reception.

Ang's famous study of *Dallas* (1985) also addressed the question of how viewers read the soap. In response to an advertisement, Ang received 42 letters from the viewers who wanted to participate in her study. She read these letters in terms of a discourse generated by these participants. She also acknowledged *Dallas* as a 'product of the commercial culture industry, Dallas is explicitly offered to the public as an object for pleasurable consumption' (1985: 19). Although, acknowledging the role of the commercial industry in producing a

product such as *Dallas* for pleasurable viewing, she did not explore the production side further. Nevertheless, I found her qualitative approach to viewers' responses useful in developing my own analysis of viewers' responses to Pakistani programmes. More useful still as a model, however, was how Andrea Press (1991) researched how women of different economic backgrounds read the content of soaps in the US. She found that working class women found it difficult to relate to the themes covered in the soap, especially when women in the soaps are given a choice because choice was the prerogative of middle class women. Her middle class respondents, meanwhile found the themes more realistic and closer to their lives. Press argued, then, that how viewers, 'interact with television culturally is more a function of their social class membership than their membership in a particular gender group' (1991: 177).

In case of studies on Pakistani television, there is a doctoral thesis by Anjum Zia (2007) titled *Impact of Cable television on Women: A Comparative study on heavy and light viewers*. It explores the effect of cable television on women's lifestyle. There are surveys on the viewership of PTV, cable and satellite television in urban and rural areas conducted by Audience Scape and Gallup, or a report on safety of journalists in Pakistan, but there is hardly any qualitative research based on interviews of viewers and their responses to the liberalised media. In case of drama serials, a doctoral thesis by Saleha Suleman (1999) has looked at *Tanhaiyan* (Solitude) and *Deewarain* (Walls) as the two case studies for textual analysis. She traces the representation of gender in these drama serials, and argues that this genre provides occasional space for representations against the dominant ideology. Moreover, she opines that media can be used for the project of women emancipation and social change, however, she warns that media alone cannot contribute towards change, other factors such as socioeconomic

are also important in this regard.²³ Another study conducted by Kothari (2005) is closest to my project. With a focus on textuality, production and consumption of drama serial, Kothari explores the aspect of *zanana* (sphere of women) where women-based discourses are created. She attempts to understand how drama serials evolved through periods of different political regimes. Kothari argues that this genre stresses the importance of 'home' as an indispensable sphere for women in Pakistan. Looking at the works of three writers: Fatima Suraiya Bajiya, Hasina Moin and Nurulhuda Shah, she examines the usage of *zanana* in their drama serials (2005: 300). Further, she notes how these writers have occasionally challenged the patriarchal norms and the state-led *dupatta* policy. Moreover, she examines how a set of female viewers appropriate the content of drama serial *Padosi* (Neighbour) to make a claim that women negotiate their 'prescribed limits in an Islamist patriarchal society' (2005: 290).

Talib and Idress (2012) also identify four dominant patterns in the Pakistani soap operas. These include, validation through matrimony, rescuing the frail maiden and *Chadar aur Chaar dewari* (Shawl and four walls). They also identify another two areas of counter narratives such as a morning show *The First Blast* and the forum offered by South Asian Women in Media (SAWM). Idrees and Talib (2012) restrict their focus to a few case studies selected across different genres. However, another study by Tahir H Naqvi (2011) offers an insight into the content on cable television in post-liberalisation era and how it reflects plurality and policy of moderation on screen. He argues that private television networks 'differ from state-based approach by conceiving of moderation in more substantive terms as a cultural politics that is integral to commercial success' (2011: 121)²⁴. While drawing on the character of Begum Nawazish Ali

²³ Accessed though Proquest. No permission to directly quote from this thesis, however, paraphrasing is allowed.

²⁴ Referring to the Musharraf's policy of moderation.

in particular, he addresses the question of moderation evoked by the private channels.

Useful as these studies have been, this thesis has a much broader remit. I will not only be considering viewers' responses across economic class (middle class versus lower middle class) and generation (older women versus younger women), but also in terms of their intersecting identities as women and Muslims. Moreover, the thesis is not limited to a single genre. It does not rely only upon the discourse generated by viewers' responses, but on that of the producers. In this way, I argue that this project not only gives a comprehensive view of how gender-based content is produced in Pakistani television culture, but provides a more holistic model for doing feminist media research.

1.4 The Public/private distinction in Pakistani society:

The content in question in this project revolves around the public/private distinction in Pakistani society as laid under *Shariah* and the viewers' sense of who they are, also depends upon their engagement with religion. It is therefore important to offer a brief account in this introduction of the duties and rights of women prescribed under *Shariah*. In particular, I will focus here on the public/private distinction in the light of Islamic literature.

Abul Ala Maududi, one of the founders of the Pakistani right wing political party, *Jamaat-e-Islami*, has played an instrumental role in defining modern day Islam in Pakistan. Along with other South Asian public intellectuals of Islam such as Israr Ahmed and Amin Ehsan Islahi who were campaigning for political Islam, Maududi did not approve of women's participation in the public sphere. Maududi, however, eventually mellowed his stance. According to Amina Jamal (2010: 334), the Jama'at Women Wing

‘formally opposes any form of women’s presence or participation in public life; however it legitimates the present-day public organising and activism by its members by invoking the Islamic principles of contingency, according to which the forbidden is suspended for reasons of public interests (*maslaha*)’.

Maududi discussed the restrictions Islam imposes on women in a book titled, *Al Hijab Purdah – The role of women in Islam* (where *purdah* is translated as the veil or separation). In this work, which was later translated into English by Al Ashari (2010), Abul Ala Maududi explains his version of the public/private distinction in the light of the Quran and *Hadith* (sayings of Prophet Muhammad pbuh). While referring to the *private sphere*, he stresses that ‘in this organisation the woman has been made queen of the house. Earning a living for the family is the responsibility of the husband, while her duty is to keep and run the house with his earnings’ (Maududi, 2010: 147) He based this argument on this *hadith* (statement and actions of Muhammad) from *Al Bukhari*:

‘The woman is the ruler over the house of her husband, and she is answerable for the conduct of her duties’.

On one hand, this *hadith* empowers woman, while on the other it holds woman answerable to her husband, and to the Creator.

Syed Jalaludin Omri (2006) who is another Islamic intellectual and *Ameer* (Head) of Jamaat-e-Islami India, also notes that women’s activity sphere is their household and ‘it is no fairness to woman that she should be taken out from her natural field of work and pushed into an unnatural field of work... If woman does not bear the responsibility of the house, she cannot claim her rights. Thereafter, she will have to work in such a field to pass her life which will not be in fact her own field and where she will have to face such a partner at every step who will be stronger than her’ (2006: 14). Clearly for Omri, a woman

cannot emerge from the roles assigned to her by the nature, and she falls short of the competencies that are required for the public domain.

Traditionally, what barred women further from accessing the public sphere, is another narration discussed by Maududi: an unmarried woman is not allowed to go on a journey except in company of a *mahram* (a male member of the family with whom sexual relationship is forbidden). In the light of the *hadith* from Abu Da'ud (third of the canonical hadith collections), Maududi notes that 'a woman should not be given such freedom of moving alone as may land her in trouble.' (2010: 150) Such an understanding directly taken from *Quran* and the tradition of *hadith*, restricts women to the household and sheds lights on her lack of judgement in the public matters. 'In short, Islam has not approved that a woman should move out of her house without a genuine need. The most appropriate place for her according to the Islamic law is her home' (2010: 148). This will become relevant to the thesis because, of course, television grants women access to a mediated public sphere that does not require them to leave the environment of the home. It will however raise the issue of consent of a *mahram* to directly participate in the mediated public sphere.

If Muslim societies take their understanding of the 'public/private distinction' from the *Quran* and *Sunnah* (Prophet's acts) then this has consequences for the level of personal autonomy women have in the private domain. For instance, if women are completely walled off from the public sphere, how can they comment on issues of a public nature or make their personal issues political? In the conservative society that Pakistanis are currently living in, access to a mediated public sphere can empower the women, who are otherwise living under the influences of such Islamic interpretations. For example, 'a woman is also not allowed to marry anyone she pleases against the wish of the responsible people of her question of marriage.'

(2010: 15). Interestingly, the gender-based talk shows and breakfast shows are now offering counselling on how to seek legal protection (in terms of state law - Shariah laws are separate) for marrying against the will of the *wali* (male head of the family, usually father, brother or an uncle). While, in the drama serial, the right to women's privacy within home is also highlighted.

Departing from the classical texts has become difficult for Muslims in Pakistan in recent years. The blasphemy law has never been as powerful as now (Hanif, 2012)²⁵. Still, there are a few liberal scholars such as Amina Wudud (1999), Asma Barlas (2002), Asghar Ali Engineer (1997) and Javed Ahmed Ghamidi (2012) who have taken issue with such traditional interpretations of Islam that place women in the private sphere, assign a subordinate position to them, or call them *naqis-ul-aqal* (intellectually deficient). However, these scholars have no place in the mainstream public sphere in Pakistan. A specific case that needs attention is that of Javed Ahmed Ghamidi who has been forced to leave the country and is now seeking asylum in Malaysia.²⁶ His speeches and talks have become controversial for his position on apostasy and etiquettes for socialisation between men and women (popularly known as *Mard o Zan ka ikhtilaat*)²⁷. These days Ghamidi gets to participate in some talk shows on Samaa TV (a channel not as mainstream as Geo News and ARY News). Therefore, I argue in this thesis that even if the counter narrative is pushed out of the popular channels and the primetime, it still features in the mainstream public sphere to nurture its own counter/subaltern public. In this sense, the liberalisation in the media has opened up many areas for debate.

²⁵ See for example, Hanif, M. (2012) How to commit blasphemy in Pakistan, *The Guardian*, [Online] Available at : <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/05/pakistans-blasphemy-laws-colossal-absurdity> (Accessed: August 2, 2014)

²⁶ See for example, Walsh, D. (2011) Islamic scholar attacks Pakistan's blasphemy laws, *The Guardian* [Online] Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/20/islam-ghamidi-pakistan-blasphemy-laws> (Accessed May 14, 2014)

²⁷ Ghamidi has rearticulated the Verses on Hijab.

1.5 Gendered citizenship in Pakistan:

In the section above, I explained how *Shariah* regulates the sexuality and morality of women in the Islamic society. It is also relevant to the definition of gendered citizenship. However, when questions related to rights and freedoms of women are raised in the mediated public sphere, the debates revisit, not just the Islamic laws but also the state law. Therefore, this section is aimed to provide a brief sketch of gendered citizenship in relation to the constitutional state in Pakistan.

Pakistan was created as a separate homeland for Muslims. Therefore nationalism in Pakistan has its roots in Islam. In fact, the discourse on nationalism has, to date been claimed in the idiom of Islam and the national identity cannot be abstracted from its sole *raison d'être* (See for example, Grunenfelder 2013 and Shaheed, 2010). After the inception of Pakistan, Ayub Khan, as the second president of Pakistan was the first one to introduce The Family Law Ordinance of 1961, which raised the legal age of marriage (from 14 to 16 for women, and 18 to 21 for men). Bruce Lawrence describes it as '[t]he benchmark of Pakistan's effort to provide legal rights for all its citizens' (Lawrence, 1994:177). Although he judges the Ordinance to have been 'hardly radical', he argues that its provisions nevertheless 'did curtail polygyny and also enhanced women's rights in the event of divorce'. It was also a law that was criticised by the Islamist forces for the way it interferes 'in the private domain, a domain in which only Muslim law courts can intervene' (177).

The other major statutory development in relation to women's citizenship is to be found in the current Constitution, which came into effect on 14th August, 1973. In this Constitution, women secured equal rights to men (Article 8 to Article 28). Yet, these Constitutional developments do not seem to occupy the mediated public discourse on gender in Pakistani television today.

Women are represented as subjugated beings with restricted agency. Several examples of this depiction will be taken up in this thesis (See for example, Chapter 4 and Chapter 7).

In 1979, the *Hudood Ordinance* was passed under the dictatorial regime of Zia-ul-Haque. Part of the project of Islamisation (aka *Nizam-e-Mustafa*) of Pakistan, the *Hudood Ordinance* was passed to penalise those who commit adultery and rape. However, the *Ordinance* was inadequate in distinguishing between the rape and adultery, and women subjected to rape were often accused of adultery. It was not until Musharraf's regime that the law was amended. The Women Protection Bill has been able to differentiate between the rape and adultery. However, it is also not immune to criticism from the Islamic Council of Ideology²⁸. It is also worth noting that Pakistan's female Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, who was highly critical of Zia's policies, did not take this issue up. She was neither a feminist nor could she afford to annoy the Islamist elements on this issue. This is a useful reminder that there is no necessary link between the political citizenship of women in Pakistan and their access to, or promotion of social and civil rights.²⁹

In the post-liberalisation era, the activists, victims, legal advisors and Muslim scholars actively debated the *Ordinance* on television. Though debates in the mediated public sphere may not be the only factor that led to the amendment in the law, they played a significant role in bringing the issue to the

²⁸ See for example: Women Protection Act 2006: CII, (2013) *Dunya News TV* [Online] Available on: <http://dunyanews.tv/index.php/en/Pakistan/193476-Women-Protection-Act-2006-unacceptable-CII-> (Accessed: 10 May, 2014)

Council of Islamic Ideology is another constitutional body that advises legislature whether or not a certain law is repugnant to Islam, for more details see: <http://cii.gov.pk/aboutcii/Introduction.aspx>

²⁹ See for example, Anderson (1993) for a detailed discussion on the genderbinds faced by Benazir Bhutto in the field of politics.

attention of ordinary people. Although the remnants of the *Hudood Ordinance* are still in place, with around 7000 women and children languishing in prisons under this *Ordinance* (Farooq: 2006), the amendment in the *Ordinance* has been a step taken to empower women in Pakistan. But clearly, having rights does not mean full protection of women in Pakistan. In fact, I would argue that despite the rights, women continue to suffer from exploitative practices in the name of religion and culture.

It is clear that with the liberalisation of media in Pakistan, and especially television, the rights of women have become the subject of debate in the mediated public sphere. The rise of the private channels played a significant role in bringing the *Hudood Ordinance* into the public light. In fact, it was the popular genres in local television culture that took up themes related to rape and adultery to highlight the exploitative nature of the law.³⁰ On the basis of my research, I will argue that the awareness generated through programmes that facilitate cultural citizenship also strengthens civil and social dimensions of the traditional model of citizenship. In other words, women's absence from the traditional forms of citizenship could come to an end if such gender related issues become part of the mediated public sphere.

1.6 Overview of the chapters

The second chapter in the thesis is titled *Conceptual Framework*, and lays the conceptual foundation of this research. By engaging with the works of scholars such as Benhabib (1992), Warner (2002) and Dayan (2005), the discussion in the first section focusses on the definitions and attributes of publics followed by a section of cultural citizenship. With reference to the works of feminist scholars

³⁰ Shows such as *Alim Online* and *Uljhan Suljhan* were crucial in offering the discursive spaces for debate.

such as Landes (1998), Felski (1986), Benhabib (1992) and Fraser (1990), the second section addresses the question of the utility of the concept of the public sphere for different emancipatory projects. In the third section, I aim to understand how popular culture can be understood in terms of the public sphere. I will argue that certain issues such as those related to gender can also be addressed in an emotion-laden rhetorical style. The chapter then goes on to argue that popular culture offers a resource for practising cultural citizenship. In the last section, the discussion focuses on the commodity question in the tradition of political economy of the media. It argues that within the advertisers-driven media, ratings are the commodity exchanged between the different stakeholders, and that in turn determines the content produced. This chapter offers to synthesise the key concepts, their genealogies in both Pakistani and other contexts, and moves towards a theoretical platform to inform the fieldwork.

The third chapter sets out the *methodological framework*. A combination of methods are used in this study, including qualitative content analysis and textual analysis, individual interviews and focus groups. The chapter will describe and justify the choice of methods used and introduce the specific case studies. For the interactive genre, six shows have been selected, namely, *Alim aur Alam* (Scholar and the Global Society), *Hawa Ki Baiti* (Daughter of Eve), *Geo Hina Kay Sath* (Live with Hina), *Utho Jago Pakistan* (Wake Up Pakistan), *Subh Saveray Maya Kay Sath* (Early Morning with Maya), *Good Morning Pakistan*. For the narrative form eight case studies have been used. These are: *Qaid e Tanhai* (Imprisoned in Loneliness), *Jannat Se Nikali Hui Aurat* (Woman Expelled from Heaven), *Roag* (Sorrow), *Mairi Zaat Zarra-e-Benishaan* (My Self, a Speckle Unfound). In addition, two case studies from the crime shows, *Shabbir Toh Dekhay Ga* (Shabbir Will Watch) and *Jurm Bolta Hae* (Crime Speaks) were selected that fall into the category of narrative form as well as interactive

genres. In this chapter, I will introduce the formats and the dominant themes of these case studies.

Chapter four titled *Openness in Gender-based content* begins by defining the dense concept of openness in relation to the televisual content. It is a term that is taken from the viewers' discourse as revealed in the focus groups, and refers to the content that is deemed open or bold in Pakistani television culture. What appears to be open in terms of gender-based content is focused on three issues: firstly; it refers to losing modesty and abandoning *dupatta* (the long stole that is used for covering the chest, which is an essential part of women's wardrobe in Pakistan); secondly; it refers to the use of language that is offensive for family viewing in the lounge; thirdly; it is related to issues that are considered inappropriate for discussion in an Islamic society, such as homosexuality and prostitution. To put it another way, themes raised in this chapter will highlight how 'change' in content is met with resistance or an inherent desire for not changing the content, often comparing it with the content in 1990s.

Chapters five, six and seven will then take the reader through a detailed account of the production and reception of the gender-based content.

Chapter five titled *Understanding production of the gender-based content* deals exclusively with the first part of the research question, which is: why content in relation to gender has changed. In exploring this question, it focusses on the producers' perception of their audiences. The discussion explores how producers in different capacities (directors, production heads, content heads and writers) assume that housewives form the actual audience group, and the importance of ratings for setting any trend or formula for popular content (for example, how tragedy, misery and negativity sell better than optimism in relation to gendered themes). The chapter then goes on to analyse the power of

the sales and marketing department over the creative department (writers, directors, content heads) and the extent to which commercial broadcasters understand their role as facilitators of a public sphere.

Looking at the gender-based content, it seems that the silence has been broken on several taboos. In chapter six, I pursue the question of whether or not producers have an agenda to emancipate or empower women. The chapter is divided on the basis of genres. The first section deals with those involved in the production of the drama serials. This includes content heads, directors and writers. The producers discuss the potential of their content to bring change in the society. In the next section, producers who are working for the interactive talk show genres discuss the limitation of their platforms to effect change, although there is a significant exception in the case of the hosts of the religion-based talk shows.

Chapter seven explores the debates raised in the previous chapter with an assessment of how audiences view gender-based content in relation to bringing change, and an evaluation of the different patterns of engagement of viewers with the various genres. In the first section on drama serials, I describe how viewers identify three themes: first, the issue of the joint family system and how it relates to viewers' own subjective positions; second, the issue of *halala*³¹, the right of women to divorce under *Shariah*; and third, a specific issue that has influenced the viewers directly, the case of *Roag*, a drama serial that highlights

³¹ The term 'Halala' is when a man has irrevocably divorced his wife, and they (or some people) intentionally plan and arrange for another person to temporarily marry the (divorced) wife, so that the wife can again become legal again for the first husband. This intentional plotting and planning for arranging the temporary marriage of the divorced wife with another person to intentionally circumvent the Laws of Allah and make her legal for her first husband is what is known as 'Halala'. This definition is cited on Islamhelpline.net, Available at <http://www.islamhelpline.net/node/4722> (Accessed: 20 September, 2014).

the issue of child rape in a public space. The second section addresses the question of change and empowerment of female viewers in relation to the religion-based talk shows. The discussion demonstrates different levels of engagement across class, age and religious inclination. In the third section on breakfast shows, viewers comment on the necessity of these shows for certain economic classes. The last section of this chapter addresses the question of change in relation to crime shows. All the viewers in my sample acknowledge the importance of reporting crimes against women, but it raises other problems. The necessity of breaking the silence on gender based crimes is linked to rising stress levels, and there is concern for protecting the honour and dignity of the victims.

In the last chapter titled *Conclusion*, it revisits the theoretical questions raised in the *Conceptual Framework*. It examines how this project has intervened with the existent debates on publics, cultural citizenship, the public sphere theory and the popular culture. It discusses how reception depends upon viewers' immediate context, their class and their identities as Muslims, Pakistanis and as women.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the context of this research was explained; this chapter will discuss the conceptual frameworks brought to bear in this study. The concept of publics, cultural citizenship and public sphere are explored, considering these in relation to popular culture. Finally, the chapter considers a political economy perspective on production and consumption. I begin by looking for the terms close to audiences and publics in the local language and then move on to engage with the Western literature on these two terms. Since, I am looking for the political/citizenship aspects of the audiences of gender-based content, in Section 2.2, I engage with the concept of the public in detail followed by a discussion of the concept of cultural citizenship. In Section 2.3, the chapter examines the relevance of the model of the public sphere for modern times, but more specifically, for understanding gender-based content. In doing so, it engages with the work of the feminist scholars who have rearticulated the model of public sphere to serve a feminist project. Section 2.4 then goes on to examine how popular culture can be understood in terms of ideas of cultural citizenship and an emerging public sphere, revisiting the term 'political'. Finally Section 2.5 aims to understand media production and consumption through a political economy perspective.

2.2: Audiences, Publics and Cultural Citizens

I begin this section by first trying to locate the term 'audience' in the local language Urdu, and then attempt to evaluate the utility of the terms, publics and cultural citizens for this study.

2.2.1: Looking for the term in the local language (Urdu):

I begin this chapter by looking at the terms used for media audiences in the local language. The question of translation comes to the fore, as there are no direct synonyms for the words 'public' and 'audience' in Urdu. Words used in this context include: *hazireen* (for those who are present), *samaeen* (for listeners and radio audiences), *nazreen* (for viewers and television audiences), *tamashai* (for spectators), *sarifeen* (for consumers – commonly used to refer to the consumers within commercial breaks on television) and *shehri* for (citizens). The sense of a public within a national context is referred to as a 'nation' (*Qaum*), while another community-oriented expression that finds a unique and prominent place within the national narrative is that of the Muslim community or *Ummah*. As the former British colony that has English as one of the official languages, Pakistani society borrows heavily from the English language but this is not to suggest that the expressions are used in the same way. The term 'public' is more commonly used to refer to the common people and the ordinary citizens (embedded in the concept of the nation) rather than an association or an imagined community of people tied to a cause or an issue. In the Pakistani television industry, the producers mostly refer to their audiences as viewers and occasionally as a public. However, their use of these terms connotes consumers. In the commercial industry, which is at the heart of this

research, the producers are by and large concerned with consumers in general and their ratings in particular.

2.2.2 Defining conceptual terms

As there is no term in the local language that is close to the understanding of the audiences and the publics (as used in Western scholarship), the academic discussion in this section draws from Western scholarship. In doing so, it argues that the term 'audiences' in the plural is far richer than the singular 'audience'. Alongside the term 'audiences', there are several other associated terms such as publics, citizens, consumers and fans. These terms can be differentiated by their attributes.

According to the OED, audiences are defined as:

the assembled spectators or listeners at a public event such as a play, film, concert, or meeting; the people who watch or listen to a television or radio programme; the readership of a newspaper, magazine, or book, the people giving *attention* to something.

In this definition, *attention* is the key element in becoming a member of an audience. However, the term 'public' appears to be more dense and defined in several ways, of which two are of particular interest to this project: first, with reference to going public which is defined as, 'to reveal details about a previously private concern' and second as, 'a section of the community having a particular interest or connection'. Cultural citizens, on the other hand, refer to the community of audience with a bonding to popular culture, a bonding that enables reflection on certain issues (Hermes, 2005). These analytical categories are helpful in identifying the *engagement* patterns of the audiences with any media text which unfold in multiple ways. At a single moment, audiences can perform as *publics*, as *cultural citizens* for a particular genre or a social cause and

as *consumer* of a given media text. Likewise, at any other moment, audiences can choose to *disengage*.

2.2.3 Understanding the concept of 'public' through attributes:

In this section, I will primarily engage with the works of Warner (2002), Dayan (2005), Livingstone (2005) and Benhabib (1996) to explore the attributes of the public. The discussion that follows will address publics in terms of five attributes: performance, representativeness, reflexivity, autonomy, 'strangerhood and subjectivity'. These all have resonance for the ways that publics can be understood in relation to gender-based content in Pakistani television culture.

The first attribute I take from Dayan (2001) (2005) and Warner (2002) is that of *performance*. Dayan argues that 'performance links the notion of public to that of a public sphere. A public not only offers attention, it calls for attention. Any public requires another public watching it perform. The performance may be polemic or consensual...A public must 'go public' or it is not a public.' (2005: 52) The aspect of an *obligation to perform* is useful for this study for it allows an examination of whether the nature of content is inviting and engaging enough to motivate viewers to commit to/perform a civic duty or not. I consider performance at different levels of engagement, linking performance to representativeness. However, suggesting that 'a public must go public' is a little problematic for it assumes that a public is also a homogenous group with the same level of engagement. Likewise, it assumes that all members of a public will not only have the means to perform but also the opportunity.

Performing in this regard can have two dimensions: one that involves direct participation in the public sphere while the other is through distanced or remote engagement. This engagement can be characterised by associating with

a certain issue voluntarily by either giving attention to an issue or silently following an issue. 'Engagement', in this project, refers to giving attention to certain content and then taking a position in relation to it.

In the case of direct participation, citizens perform through direct representation, and, as part of the study, I will explore the nature of this *representativeness* of the public in relation to gender-based content. However, not all viewers get the opportunity to represent the public, rather some are privileged over others by virtue of their abilities to directly participate as a public. The virtues of these latter are worth exploring; what reasons drive them into the public domain?³² In her historical account of who constitutes a public Benhabib (1996: 206) notes that,

All hitherto known 'publics' have rested on the exclusion of certain groups of individuals from participation or deliberation on the bases that these individuals lacked the cognitive, emotional, economic, political, or cultural virtues and abilities that were considered essential to take part in the public. Throughout history, and in different cultures and societies, women, laborers who used their bodies, those who did not own property, as well as members of certain racial, religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups have been excluded from the participation in the public sphere.

Although Benhabib is not referring to Pakistan, I find it useful for understanding how *representativeness* works in stratified societies where some groups have the privilege to access the public sphere. In the case of this project, this refers to a certain economic class living in the urban areas with better access to interactive genres through telephones and email, and those who access

³² Representation will also operate in a dual sense: one that relates to re-presenting and image-making in the case of drama serials, and the second form of representation on talk shows operates through delegation and direct participation.

through letter writing. Benhabib's study also draws attention to how a public/private distinction in a society can influence access to the public sphere. For example, in a conservative society like Pakistan women can experience disadvantage in terms of accessing the mediated public sphere due to religious and social pressures. This aspect leads to the question of whether those who are privileged are speaking for themselves or can represent other disadvantaged groups or not.

Another dimension attached to the question of who gets to represent the public draws attention to the role of gate-keepers. In certain industries, gate keeping can operate at many levels; to attract a public that can also be the consumer; to engage the members of a public that can draw ratings; but also to bar certain members who can challenge the dominant discourse of the programme. This is not to suggest that there is no space for free expression; online spaces and live calls still offer that 'limited' space. But there is also a possibility that some or many members of the public have either been denied the possibility to 'speak' or choose to remain silent. I argue that those who are denied access form the *constrained* public and those who choose to remain silent form the *dormant public*. The *constrained* public, members are those willing to participate but denied access either from home (for religious and cultural reasons) or through gate-keeping. This dynamic is similar to that outlined by Livingstone (2005: 11). She does not endorse the idea of a *constrained* or a *dormant public* but notes:

An audience may not be a public because the media or the elites deny this possibility via strategies of gate-keeping or exclusion, whether for political or commercial reasons. Or, the media might attempt but fail to transform an audience into a public, as in various e-democracy initiatives. Or audiences may not wish to become publics, satisfied to engage with the media purely for reasons of identity, pleasure, knowledge or lifestyle.

While contextualising this issue in the case of the Pakistani television industry, I will argue that the opportunity to directly participate in the mediated public sphere heavily (if not entirely) depend upon the selection criteria of the gate-keepers.³³ Likewise, as much as publics are supposed to be created through their own practices, they are also organized and managed by gate-keepers. For example, editorial policy plays an important role in creating and facilitating publics. Such policy is determined through the logic of the market (profit making), though it is not above the political and social dynamics of a state. For instance, in Pakistan, gender and sexuality are regulated under *Shariah* and this is reflected on screen. However, it is also true that *Shariah* does not address or accommodate all matters concerning gender. For example, it does not address homosexuality as normal, with a consequence that if such an issue is raised by the public to challenge the Islamic interpretation of gender-based issues, it cannot be taken up in the mediated public sphere.³⁴

Equally important in this discussion on attributes of the publics is the element of joining the public. It highlights a second attribute of how the public is born through *reflexive decision*. As Dayan (2005: 57) argues, 'a public is born when members of an audience decide to join and go public. Going public involves on their part the construction of a problem, a reflexive decision to join, commit and perform, etc'. The latter is key for our understanding of the concept of the public. It arises from thinking critically on any issue that resonates with the audience's subjectivities. I argue that in assuming the role of the public,

³³ This level of determinism is argued through findings. During the fieldwork, I observed how gate-keeping operates during a live-show, with a panel of six people on live telephone calls, trying to filter. The moment any caller utters anything against *Shariah* (blasphemous) or something against the policies of the broadcaster, they disconnect the line.

³⁴ This is refeudalisation of the public sphere through Islamic discourse. This has its roots in the changing socio-political landscape of Pakistan. Only recently, the conservative elements in the National Assembly have filed a petition in the court to redefine vulgarity and obscenity in Pakistani television content. Despite several meetings held by Pakistan Electronic and Media Regulatory Authority, a single definition is awaiting consensus.

viewers seek motivation from two sides, one that is derived from the issue/discourse itself and other arising from their own subjectivities.³⁵ I will come back to the significance of subjectivity later in the chapter, but at this moment, I want to stress the importance of discourse. Discourse plays a crucial role in the existence of a public and engaging it in critical reflection. The reflexive decision to join is also nurtured through discourse. According to Warner (2005: 50), 'public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself. It is autotelic; it exists only as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast, Web sites posted, speeches delivered, opinions produced. It exists by virtue of being addressed.'

In the passage, discourse 'as the end' highlights certain concerns. It relates to my question on what role commercial media play in producing certain discourses. Is discourse really an end or means to an end? For example, it can be assumed that those whose businesses run on the circulation and the consumption of certain discourses play an important role in creating publics. In this way, publics can also be understood as consumers of certain discourses and discourses can be taken as sellable products that need to be consumed as well as circulated. Further, I will examine how producers identify the popular discourses in society in order to seek more consumers (that I consider as a viewing public) through television. These producers take informed/calculated decisions to find publics for certain discourses, and embedded in them is the motivation for audiences to join the public. Therefore, in this way consumers, measured audiences or, to use Dayan's term (2005: 62), 'pronounced publics' originate from the same group. It is the same set of people that are addressed

differently by different producers for their own agendas. It is worth noting, however, that whilst there is always a possibility of finding a public for particular gendered content its role as the public may not matter as much to the producers as its role as consumers.

The third attribute that I discuss here relates to the concept of the autonomy of the public. Although producers can have an interest in creating publics and channelling discourses, this does not entirely challenge or further the *autotelic* nature and *sovereignty* that a public may enjoy. Warner (2002: 51) poses that a public must exist independent of institutions of state and of church and only through this characteristic, is a public conceived to be sovereign. For Warner, autonomy and sovereignty are essential to the idea of a public constituted through discourse. However, in the case of this project, instead of suggesting complete autonomy of a public and emergence of a new public, one can also think in terms of 'the *projection* of an existing public' into newer spaces. By that, I mean to imply that it is worth exploring if gender-based discourse has only articulated an already existing public facilitated by other institutions, such as religion. If that turns out to be the case, does it make less of a public of the gender-based-discourse and more of the religion?³⁶ To put it in other words, the public of a gender-based discourse (that focuses upon *Shariah*) can also be part of the pre-existing public of the religion. Extending it further, I will argue that a public cannot be understood in terms of a single identity. As the public of gender-based discourse, members of the viewing public are not only women but also Muslim of a certain ethnic background, a certain class and from a certain family structure (joint or nuclear). With intersecting identities, this public has to be read in terms of intersecting discourses of gender and religion. I will also be exploring whether the circulation of gender-based discourses can

³⁶ I know this is problematic, because I am aiming to say that an existing community of housewives with inclination towards religion is targeted by media as their prospective consumers, and this public of gender-based discourses comes from the same stock; this is led by my findings.

be abstracted from the pressures of institutions such as state and religion and how these institutions facilitate this circulation in the commercial industry.

The last attribute that requires attention at this point is that of how a public is addressed and this directly relates to the concept of *subjectivity*. The concept of subjectivity is crucial for this study. Here I follow Dahlgren (1995: 22), who argues that subjectivity is directly related to identity. It is about 'our sense of who we are to ourselves and to others, because it shapes the way in which we participate, and may well determine if we participate or not.' This sense-making of who we are largely takes place in the private sphere (that I call home in this study).

This idea of subjectivity was stressed by Habermas, in his discussion of the public. He argued that in the bourgeois public sphere 'the public understanding of the public use of reason was guided specifically by such private experiences as grew out of the audience-oriented subjectivity of the conjugal family's domain' (1989: 48-49). Of course, Habermas' idea of subjectivity is Euro-centric but how this concept unfolds in the context of Pakistan is worth exploring. I will be arguing that audience-oriented subjectivity operates in a unique manner. Unlike Europe, the joint-family system is still prevalent and this directly impacts upon the living experiences of women within such households. The private sphere does not follow its own laws; it is not a realm devoid of external pressures. Rather, home in Pakistani society is a political institution run by either cultural norms and/or *Shariah*. Women's sense-making in relation to (collective) identities in society and at home, is not only derived from the gendered discourse but also from their immediate context. In many cases, the political dynamics at home can become 'the' reason for joining a public (constrained or otherwise) for personal reasons but also in the capacity of a citizen.

It is also worthwhile to consider that despite the willingness to join the public and directly participating in the mediated public sphere, some members can be denied the access to go public (that is directly participating through phone calls) by their *mehram* (male guardians) or even their mothers-in-law. This raises questions about the unstable/constraining sphere of human subjectivities (private sphere/home) and how in some cultures it can become the reason for not joining the public.

Moreover, it is not just the hierarchical nature of the sphere that directly affects notions of subjectivity but also the spatial constitution of home in a joint family system³⁷. For example, the living room (referred to as the lounge in Pakistan) has extraordinary relevance in this regard: this space has a politics of its own. It is where members of the family spend most of their time, and it is also where television is kept for viewing. Due to women's subordinate position at home, their viewing habits are also regulated by their *mehram* and mothers-in-law. Due to the etiquette of living in a joint family system, the programmes that feature issues of shame cannot be watched in the lounge. In this sense, home becomes a space that offers limited affordance to perform as members of a public through direct participation. In such circumstances, identifying the resonance and then reflexively joining the public can operate either overtly (in few cases), but most of the time secretly. I will argue that members of a public can engage with the discourse by either endorsing a cause, empathising with it, by critiquing it, but also silently following it through watching (as members of *constrained* or *dormant public*).

To this attribute of subjectivity, I will also include the dimension of class. Families are also situated within a wider habitat of 'class'. Our sense of who we are also depends upon acknowledging our own and others' socio economic

³⁷ An extended family system where parents live with their children and their children's families.

class. Although family structure plays a significant role in one's engagement pattern in relation to a discourse, so does socio-economic class. Moreover, socioeconomic class signifies one's habitus that includes class-oriented ethos, privileges, associations, tastes and also certain expectations from the members of a class. Members reinforce their social positioning through recognising the hierarchy between their class and the other classes, and distancing themselves from the 'taste as well as expected behaviour' of other classes. With no intention to deeply engage with Bourdieu (1984), I acknowledge that cultural consumption heavily depends upon the cultural competence that is nurtured by socio-economic class. Bourdieu (1984: XXIX) argues that 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier'. In this project I argue that members of different classes can vary in their preference for certain genres and certain content. Moreover, there is a possibility that the need as well as the pressure to maintain one's taste/class can also influence the engagement patterns with gender-based content. In this regard, Bourdieu argues:

'In fact, through the economic and social conditions which they presuppose, the different ways of relating to realities and fictions, of believing in fictions and the realities they stimulate, with more or less distance and detachment, are very closely linked to the different possible positions in social space and consequently, bound up with the systems of dispositions (habitus) characteristic of the different classes and class fractions.' (1984: XXIX)

Relating it to this study, I will argue, that members of a certain class can empathise with a cause promoted in an interactive talk shows, but may not choose to participate directly, because it may seem 'below' their class, or they may appear 'out of character'. In this way, they face the dilemma and also the pressure to retain their membership into a class. For instance, as we shall see (see Chapter 4 and 7), viewers of the middle class may not report on a gender-based crime (such as rape) to protect 'honour and shame' that is closely related

to middle class ethos. This pushes the members of this class into a shell of a *dormant* or even a *constrained* public. Discourse travels through different genres and across different media, a public comes alive through the circulation of discourses. But, other factors such as family structure, ethnicity, religious-inclination and class can influence the bonding between discourse and a public.

In this section, I have looked at the interdependent notions of audiences and publics. Rather than see them as opposing terms, I have suggested that the public originates from the set of audiences for a particular content, and that the engagement patterns of the members of the public vary with their attributes.

2.2.4: Relevance of the concept of cultural citizenship:

To talk about citizenship means to discuss sets of duties and obligations that states owe to the public and vice versa. However to talk about cultural citizenship means opening up the discourse on traditional citizenship to a discourse on identities, otherness and tolerance (Turner, 1994; Pakulski, 1997; Steveson, 2001; Hermes, 2005, 2010). It is through unhindered and symbolic representation of identities in public fora that the right to be culturally different is registered (Pakulski, 1997: 80).

The definition of citizenship lays the foundation of the concept of cultural citizenship. Needless to say, that citizenship is mainly about belonging and inclusion of people/groups in to a wider community, but in the academic literature, cultural citizenship does not have a single/stable definition. Hermes (2005: 10), for example, defines cultural citizenship as 'the process of bonding and community building, and reflection on that bonding, that is implied in partaking of the text-related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticizing offered in the realm of (popular) culture'. According to this

definition, Hermes is suggesting an imaginary community (to use Anderson's term) of people who share a sense of belonging based on their interests. In this regard, popular culture is not considered to have lesser value and the casual bonding built around it is regarded to be meaningful. Extending this, I argue that it is in the casual use and arrangement of the citizens that counter publics evolve and negotiate the dominant ideologies. In their recent intervention into this debate, Hermes and Muller (2010: 193) have defined cultural citizenship in terms of performance, that can also be viewed 'as an "insurgent" practice which requires further mediation into other spheres of private and public life by policies or civic action to produce critical societal impact'. In this way, cultural citizenship can be identified as the first step toward a civic move or a pre-political move. However, I argue that while taking this move, the intention of the cultural citizen may only be to get registered on a public medium. It can also be an attempt to denounce one's own victimhood (in case of rape victims appearing on television).

While stressing the importance of the practice of cultural citizenship, Stevenson (2001: 3) invites our attention towards a crucial aspect of inclusion and exclusion from this kind of citizenship. People who do not engage with such avenues (media) cannot participate as citizens and their non-engagement can be read in two ways. That is, either they do not want to engage with such sites of participation or they do not have the means to do so. I suggest that in the context of this study, exclusion from the practices of cultural citizenship is largely related to being denied access. This can operate from two sides, either from home (*mehram*) or from the industry. It can also depend on the policies of the commercial broadcasters and the role of the gate-keepers.

Without ruling out the possibility that cultural citizenship is 'about becoming active producers of meaning and representation and knowledgeable consumers' (Isin and Wood, 1999: 152), consumers are also subject to

constraints. Cultural citizenship is also about disciplining and subjection, the latter occurring through producers' channelling of performance through editorial policies, genre conventions and media-texts. For my project, it is important to understand how such media institutions, if not the state, can, in these ways, temper or create the citizens for their interests. As Miller (1993) describes, the cultural capitalist-state produces and tempers 'civic cultural subject' through the use of technologies of power. Since my own intention in this project is to look for tempered cultural subjects as well as those who resist tempering, Miller's book is useful in offering a discussion on how technologies of power create 'ethical incompleteness' (1993: xii). This 'ethical incompleteness', Miller stresses, is a kind of invitation extended towards the cultural subjects to recognize their obligations towards a higher authority/government/state. But what cultural subjects may, in fact adopt is, a project of self-reflexivity, a battle inside one's own conscience between what is right and what is being ordered/indoctrinated from above. Therefore, any project for creating cultural citizens may end up in producing incomplete clones of 'civic cultural subjects', the phenomenon which he refers to as 'incivility'.

In the case of Pakistan, I argue that it is not just the state and government that fall into the category of higher authority to whom fealty is needed, religion-based pressure groups also fall into this category. Rather than cultural citizens having complete freedom to express themselves on any gender-related issues, I will argue that performance as cultural citizens can be seen as practices of empowerment on the one hand and disciplining and restraint on the other hand. Nevertheless, it is within these practices of cultural citizenship that counter publics may evolve. This is a public that may be dormant or constrained, yet distinct enough to form a counter public. This idea is explored in Chapter 4 and 7, based on viewers' discourses and practices.

2.3: Rearticulating the notion of the public sphere:

So far, I have evaluated the utility of 'publics' and 'cultural citizenship' as the two vital terms for this study. However, these terms can only be read in relation to a theory of the public sphere. This section aims to understand the concept of the public sphere and its relevance for modern times. It then attempts to understand how feminists have rearticulated the model of the public sphere to make it viable for different emancipatory projects.

Any discussion on publics is incomplete without taking into consideration the spaces for participation and performance of the publics. The sphere in which citizens come forward and act as publics is identified as the public sphere. As Habermas (2006: 73) puts it: by 'public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.' Situated in the tradition of liberal political philosophy, this model focusses on the prerequisites and the dynamics of a healthy democracy. Although Habermas acknowledged the importance of the media as a new form of public sphere, he insisted that 'a healthy public sphere requires small scale media not motivated by commercial interests' (Habermas 1991: 181-88 quoted in Butsch, 2009). Departing from Habermas' approach Dahlgren (1995: 7-9) notes:

the scale of modern society does not allow more than a relatively small numbers of citizens to be physically co-present, the mass media have become the chief institutions of the public sphere. It points to those institutional constellations of the media and other fora for information and opinion – and the social practices around them – which are relevant for political life. That these

institutional constellations and practices may be anemic does not per se mean they are irrelevant.

The essence of Dahlgren's argument lies in the fact that media institutions, despite their commercial angle, cannot be considered irrelevant for exchange of ideas and opinion, though he acknowledges that media institution may not be identical to Habermas' original ideal of the public sphere. In this study, broadcast media offer a discursive space for audiences to participate in public discourse on issues of social and political relevance. For this project, Dahlgren's theory suggests that gender based talk shows offer such spaces where marginalised publics (housewives and victims of gender abuse) use the mediated public sphere to discuss issues of concern to them. It is in these spaces that women as members of the public, and as experts in the field, participate in discussions on gender-based issues. Indeed, gender-based content has initiated conversations and debates on issues that were once considered personal (related to shame and honour of the family) and there is an obvious exchange of ideas among the members of society in these talk shows. As a result several opinions are formed although it is not common to reach a consensus, as suggested in Habermas' ideas about the public sphere.

This project will question the motivations of those involved in production of such conversations but also the public importance of debates started in these spaces. In practice, two kinds of public spheres can be associated with gender-related content in Pakistani television: one that is directly carried in the discursive space provided by the programmes, and the other that takes place within the home among family members and friends. An important aspect of this project is to examine how some women, as private citizens, present issues in a public medium that starts a conversation in several homes. In addition, I will also look at how viewing publics carry on-screen debate further into their homes and what kind of challenges they face in

initiating such conversations at home. I call on-screen discussions and the post-viewing discussions as 'public sphering', a term used by Dahlgren (1995:148).

In this project, I have also approached this dimension of public sphering from a feminist perspective. The discussion here is twofold: first, I consider the problematic issue of the common good within the Habermasian model of the public sphere; second, I explore how feminists have reclaimed the model in the form of a counter public sphere. This section will look at how debates on these two grounds inform the emerging mediated public sphere for women in the Pakistani context.

According to Landes (1998: 142), the traditional model of the public sphere was 'ill equipped to consider in public fashion the political dimension of relations in the intimate sphere.' Other feminist critics (Felski: 1986, Fraser, 1990, Benhabib: 1992, Mc Laughlin: 1993, Landes: 1998) saw the potential in this notion and reclaimed the model to make it useful for other emancipatory projects. Appreciating the utility of this concept, feminists have tried to identify the deficiencies in the original model and tried to rearticulate this notion of common good and what was considered as private in the traditional model of the public sphere. Landes (1998: 144) observes that the 'goals of generalizability and appeals to the common good may conceal rather than expose forms of domination, suppress rather than release concrete differences among persons or groups. Moreover, by banishing the language of particularity, the liberal public sphere has jeopardized its own bases of legitimation in the principles of accessibility, participation, and equality.'

Translating Landes' observation to the context of Pakistan, I will trace certain issues that fall into the 'language of particularity'. For example, issues such as the roles and rights of women under *Shariah* fall into the definition of the common good, however, homosexuality does not qualify for the common

good³⁸. Ideally speaking, the common good and matters of shared concern should be decided by 'discursive contestation' (Fraser, 1990: 71). In relation to this project, this raises two relevant questions: firstly, whether the spaces in the mediated public sphere allow discursive contestation with regards to the common good or not. If not, then it opens up another question about who gets to prioritise or define the 'common good' for publics.

Developing these ideas, Benhabib (1992) also revisits the model of public space as envisaged in Western political theory. In 'Models of Public Space', Benhabib (1992) argues that despite its inadequacies, Habermas' model of the public sphere is still compatible with modern times. It also has emancipatory potential for 'it does not stand under the constraint of neutrality, but is judged according to the criteria represented by the idea of a practical discourse' (1992: 105). Rather than formally opening up of the model of public sphere for issues of private nature, Benhabib builds on the essential trait of the public sphere, which thrives on the 'norm of egalitarian reciprocity'. According to the theory's own defining trait, issues of the public sphere cannot exclude the issues related to the private sphere which can be of concern to many participants in the public sphere. Moreover, she also asserts that opening up the discourse model for such issues will not undermine the essence of the Habermasian ideal, rather would enrich its potential: 'If in discourses the agenda of the conversation is radically open, if participants can bring any and all matters under the critical scrutiny and questioning, there is no way to predefine the nature of the issues discussed as being public ones of justice and the good life.' (1992: 110-111)

For Benhabib (1992), a revised version of the public discourse model which is not constrained by any norms in discussion, is the only way forward in feminizing the mainstream discourses on the good life and democratizing the private sphere. In this way, each participant can have equal say and influence

³⁸ Because these issues are considered as prohibited under *Shariah*.

the discourse in seeking consensus on issues of mutual concern. (See for example, Cohen in Benhabib: 1992). However, despite the potential that Benhabib (1992) sees in this model, she remains sceptical about how discourses operate in the media (112), since the idea of unconstrained discourse is vital in her conceptualization of a discursive model of public space. For her it is the '*unconstraining*' of mediated space that can at least start a conversation on several issues in the public sphere.

Although the idea of a healthy public sphere that addresses the need of all the citizens across the board, is promising, I will argue that this cannot be fully achieved in an unequal society where the mainstream public sphere is either run by the state or the commercial broadcasters, each pursuing their own agendas of disciplining and tempering (Miller, 1993). I also argue that the issue is not just about ensuring an unconstrained space, but whether even with such spaces, female citizens are able to fully use them. To be more specific, can those who live in fear and awe of religion and patriarchal culture really engage as free citizens in discursive contestation on issues of personal nature?

In order to achieve a presence in the mainstream public sphere, I follow Felski (1989) and Fraser (1990) who have identified certain paths for disadvantaged groups. Felski (1986), engaged with American and European literary theory, suggests that:

Insofar as (feminism) is a public sphere, its arguments are also directed outward, toward a dissemination of feminist ideas and values throughout society as a whole ...The feminist public sphere also constitutes a discursive arena which disseminates its arguments outwards through such public channels of communication as books, journals, the mass media, and the education system. The gradual expansion of feminist values from their roots in the women's movement throughout society as a whole is a necessary corollary of feminism's claim to embody a catalyst of social and cultural change (Felski,

1986: 167). The idea is that a feminist public sphere begins as an autonomous sphere where oppression and discrimination become the common ground for participation. Consciousness of membership in a community of an oppressed group is facilitated through literary texts and mass media. Here, oppression becomes the factor to keep the discourses in circulation which is then gradually acknowledged by the society. I will be examining how a feminist public sphere might have emerged through Pakistani television; whether it has established itself within the mainstream mediated public sphere and the nature of this feminist public sphere (liberal or conservative).

Developing these ideas Nancy Fraser explores how counter public spheres can appear and be sustained in the mainstream public sphere. In re-interpreting the theory of public sphere, she (1990) reworks four assumptions of Habermas's study. From her (1990) critique, I take two arguments relevant to an understanding of the contemporary mediated public sphere in Pakistan. Fraser (1990: 66) argues that 'it is not possible to insulate special discursive arenas from the effects of societal inequality, and that where societal inequality persists, deliberative processes in the public sphere will tend to operate to the advantage of the dominant groups and to the disadvantage of subordinates'. She argues further, that this situation worsens with a single 'comprehensive public sphere', for marginalized groups are unable to seek recognition for their rights. However, Fraser (1990: 67) also suggests that the subordinated members of society (which she calls subaltern counter publics) can 'constitute alternative publics', which formations work to their advantage, because 'to interact discursively as a member of a public – subaltern or otherwise – is to disseminate one's discourse into ever widening arenas'. She builds it up further by stressing that not all subaltern counter publics are democratic and their discursive practices can only enrich the wider public sphere. In addition, Fraser also warns that public spheres are not spaces of 'a zero degree culturethese

institutions may be understood as culturally specific rhetorical lenses that filter and alter the utterances they frame; they can accommodate some expressive modes and not others'. (62)

I draw from these two arguments to discuss the emerging counter/feminist public sphere in Pakistani television culture. For instance, I will examine the strategies of survival for the subaltern gender-based discourses in order to reach a level where they join the official public sphere (which I would rather call the mainstream public sphere). Extending the argument, I will suggest, that when the counter public establishes its discourse in the mediated public sphere, it creates an 'other' for itself. For instance, a public for a gender-based discourse has emerged in the mediated public sphere, what I call a counter public against the official patriarchal discourse. But it relies heavily on *Shariah* based discourse on gender and, establishing itself within the mainstream public sphere, this public is not democratic in its practices; it does not welcome plurality of opinion on gender-based issues. Rather it sees all issues through the lens of religion, hence pushing non-conformist thoughts, and those that hold them, to the fringes.

In Pakistan there is still no single 'unifying discourse' (to use McLaughlin's term, 1993: 610) and any such attempt to unite women under a single feminist discourse is risky. It is also worthwhile to ask why certain (conservative) discourses on feminism have a better chance of occupying the mediated public sphere than liberal discourses. This opens up several lines of inquiry: firstly why religious discourses on feminism are preferred over liberal and secular discourses and who the beneficiaries are; secondly, whether there is a link between hegemonic discourses (in this case patriarchal) and Islamic discourses; thirdly, how and why conservative discourses are also compatible with the interest of the producers; and finally, whether opening up one kind of

discourse (in this case religious) can trigger other contesting discourses such as a liberal discourse.

The questions raised here will be taken up while exploring and assessing the idea of the public sphere in relation to popular culture. It can be argued that it is in popular culture that one finds something akin to the feminist ideal of the public sphere.

2.4: Understanding the dynamics of the popular culture:

Extending the argument to consider the concept of the public sphere for feminist ideals, this section aims to understand the relationship between popular culture and the public sphere. In the commercial media industry, popular culture operates through the logic of the market. Yet scholars in cultural studies argue that 'popular culture is one of the principal sites where the divisions (on the basis of ethnicity, gender, generation, sexuality and social class are established and contested). That is popular culture is an arena of struggle and negotiation between the interests of dominant groups and the interests of subordinate groups' (Storey, 2003: 3-4).

Taking my lead from Storey (2003), I argue that popular culture offers the formats that are reflective of the public sphere. By reflection, I do not mean to suggest a mirror-image of the original model of the public sphere rather argue that popular culture fosters a form and practice similar to the Habermasian public sphere; one where debates on issues on common good/shared concerns are held reproducing the elements of Habermasian 'publicity'. Notwithstanding all the commercial imperatives of popular culture, I argue that it still does not undermine the original idea of the public sphere, rather it gives greater strength to the agency of weaker publics.

There are three lines of argument in this discussion: the first links to the body of work by Mc Guigan (2005) and Klein (2013) that follows how popular culture can render a space for practising the public sphere. The second line of argument follows scholars such as Mc Guigan (2005) Hermes (2005), Hermes and Muller (2010), Lunt and Pantti (2009), Klein (2013) and Hartley (1996) to assert the importance of emotions in envisioning the modern mediated public sphere. The third line of inquiry argues that popular culture offers a resource (to use Hermes and Muller's term) for practising cultural citizenship. The latter not only enriches the traditional discourse on citizenship regulated by the state but also facilitates the emergence of counter publics.

2.4.1: Popular culture as reflection of the public sphere:

Taking a lead from scholars referred to above, I argue that popular culture in the Pakistani context offer spaces for the intersection of the social, private and the political. In modern times, popular culture and politics are intertwined: 'they are discursively structured in many similar ways, and they inform each other, feed off each other' (Dahlgren, 2009: 141). Further, I argue that the sites of intellectual and popular culture are interdependent. Through its entertaining dimension, popular culture provides an arena where dominant ideologies and hegemonic agendas are simplified enough to make politics understandable as well as pleasurable to audiences.

In her study on unconventional representation of crimes against children, immigration and disability, Klein (2013), argues that entertainment-driven genres offer more room for discussion and education than news and infotainment. 'Through emphasising unconventional discourses around social issues that tend to be narrowly framed, the important role that entertainment television can play in providing additional material for generating discussion (or in other words, to serve the goals of a public sphere) is highlighted' (Klein, 2013: 53)

While addressing social issues such as cultural diversity and immigration, popular culture becomes a site for revisiting the political. I argue that the on-going circulation and repetition in topics of social relevance on a weekly basis (through regular episodes) allow the citizens to come back to an issue again and again. As a result, popular culture not only offers the space for deeper reflection on issues of socio-political relevance but may also have opportunity to address different aspects of an issue. Engaging with issues across different platforms (drama serials and interactive talk shows) also serves as a reminder to the public that this subject needs an urgent attention.³⁹

Issues such as those of domestic violence and *halala* (misuse of rights of divorce for women in Islam) are still not recognized as crimes under the state law, but in popular culture these are raised as discriminatory practices against women. Other rights such as choosing a partner for marriage without the consent of the male member of family (*wali*), honour killings or child rape are also taken up in popular genres and discussed in terms of rights for women in Islam. The loop holes in state law with respect to gender are also questioned in the discursive spaces of the popular culture.

In stressing the importance of popular culture, Hermes (2005) recognizes three qualities. The first depends on the element of belonging that popular culture involves. The nature of cultural products is such that they seem so attractive that one wants to belong to the community of avid viewers, fans or buyers. The second feature is the 'fascination that we have with popular fiction'.... (3) and the third which is of utmost importance to this project is that of linking public and private domains. Hermes demonstrates that while blurring the boundaries of public and private distinction, the cultural/media spaces offered are truly democratic. I am more concerned with Hermes' first

and last feature. Thus the idea that popular culture offers insight into philosophical, ideological, and cause-driven problems through easily palatable content; and that it offers a sense of membership to a community of like-minded individuals. Further, the notion that an element of interactivity and extraordinary interest in cultural products can produce newer identities as well as challenge existing understandings on the rights of people. Popular genres and entertainment in particular provoke an engagement by a public which 'lacks the cultural capital or competence to engage with democratic practice at a more political and abstract level' (Hermes, 1998: 160).

In the case of this study, I find popular culture useful in understanding how housewives from different income backgrounds make use of popular genres debating the rights of women in relation to family, reproduction, marriage and inheritance. Thus women who may otherwise not engage in the official political discourse on rights of women, get the opportunity to voice their opinion.

2.4.2: Popular culture and the emotional expression

A further line of argument that I follow in this discussion on popular culture stresses how emotions play a crucial role in engaging with issues of social relevance, especially in the case of gender-based issues. I argue that the separation between rationality and emotionality is not so helpful in understanding these issues. I concur with Dahlgren (1995) who suggests that 'rational communication is necessary, but if our horizons do not penetrate beyond the conceptual framework of communicative rationality and the ideal speech situation, we will be operating with a crippled critical theory' (1995: 109). If we were to create an ideal public sphere today with constructive input from diverse publics, we need to broaden our vision about what rationality means. In other words, in modern times our understanding of the public sphere should be more inclusive in terms of listening to what others (as members of

society) have to say. Unless we hear from others, who may communicate in more emotional ways, adhering to the strict rules of communicative rationality and ideal speech situation may not enable us to attend to the actual needs of the citizens.

Lunt and Stenner (2005: 63) extend the debate on the public sphere further by including the genre of talk shows in which 'emotional expression and conflict are central features'. They argue that a show like *The Jerry Springer Show* is an emotional public sphere that parallels the rational critical public sphere in the way that it encourages, manages and reflects upon emotional conflict in a public context.' Sceptical of the controlled environment in which the participants are allowed to publicly discuss their personal issues, Lunt and Stenner (2005) consider the emotional public sphere to be antithetical to the classical idea of the public sphere. But in Lunt and Livingstone's earlier publication (1994) popular talk shows are described as an 'oppositional public sphere' (24). In the light of these views, I would perhaps suggest that the gender-based talk shows are another reflection of the public sphere with a different order of expression.

These ideas also suggest that our understanding of the rules of performance and engagement for the publics should be revisited to embrace other rhetorical, including emotional styles. My own position is that the discussion of issues of shame and honour (such as rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment and honour killings) inevitably involves an emotional dimension. Indeed, following Lunt and Pantti (2009: 168), I argue that certain socio-political issues are only tractable through an emotionally-laden rhetoric. Instead of arguing that the discussions should be purely based on reasoned arguments, the emphasis should be on combining emotional expression with reason. The issue may start with emotionally-laden narratives in the drama

serials and the talk shows, but it can still develop into a full-scale debate based on thoughtful and reasoned arguments.

The understanding of the reflective spaces of the public sphere should be more open and inclusive toward gender issues that follow another order of expression that prioritise emotions over reason. This does not in any way downplay the importance of the issue under consideration or make it in any way less political. As Dahlgren (2009: 137) in his account of the potential of popular culture notes:

‘Popular culture offers images and symbols that express and evoke emotion that we use not least in shaping our individual and collective identities; our sense of who we are; what is right, important, and so forth. These can certainly be pertinent for how politics operates and what political views emerge.’

Talk shows and drama serials take up individual cases of violence against women that engage the public through an emotional story (real or fictitious). While doing so, they facilitate a discussion on how to seek justice through law and how to re-assimilate the victims of gender-based violence. Such treatment of the subject can take the viewer beyond the story to reflect upon the cultural practices and inadequacies of the system and to reflect on ‘what should become political’.

2.5: A political economy perspective on media consumption:

In this section I change gear, away from ideas about citizenship and publics to discuss the economics of media production, though the latter, I argue, is relevant to the former. Like any other private media industry (See for example, Giltin, 1985, Baker and Hesmondhalgh, 2011), commercial broadcasters in Pakistan also work on the basis of popularity and demand for certain kinds of content. This aspect of demand directly relates back to the primary research

question for this project, that is, 'why has content in relation to gender changed in the Pakistani television industry'. In other words, can the demand of the market also influence the content in relation to gender? Possible answers to these questions are often found in the tradition of political economy of the media, especially in the commodity question posed by Dallas Smythe in 1977.⁴⁰ In this section, I revisit the debate on the question initially posed by Smythe: 'what commodities do mass media produce'. The line of argument I follow is that all commodity exchanges in the commercial media industry depend upon the exchange of ratings, while the ratings solely depend upon the labour (work) of the audience.

A number of scholars (Smythe, 1977; Livant, 1978; Livant and Jhally, 1986; Meehan, 1984; Gitlin, 1985; Napoli, 2012) working in this tradition argue that like any other commercial industry, media are also engaged in the selling and exchange of certain commodities. The debate in this direction trivialises the importance of the content⁴¹, and argues that for the producers it is the buying and selling of certain commodities that is of importance while the content is tailored according to the popular demand. I do not trivialise the importance of the popular content and its connection to the viewers. In fact, it is in this connection with the content that the new popular demand for content emerges through ratings. Popular demand in this context, refers to the relative autonomy of audiences in choosing and rejecting certain kinds of content and who may be consumers but can also act as critically engaged publics.

In finding answer to what determines the demands of the market. I engage with the works of the authors referred to above. According to Smythe (1977), media industries produce an audience as a single commodity for

⁴⁰ This is also known as the blind spot debate. For a detailed account of this debate between the scholars in 1977-1978; see for example: Smythe (1977), Murdock (1978), Livant and Jhally (1978).

⁴¹ A criticism also raised by Murdock (1978) that the attention paid to superstructure among critical scholars working within the Marxist tradition must not be underestimated.

advertisers, and the content/message is no more than a free lunch. To put it differently, for Smythe, watching television is another form of work/labour that audiences engage in for advertisers without the deliberate intention of working. This debate was further developed by Livant (1978, 1986) who argued that audiences work for broadcasters who then sell them to advertisers. To verify the concept of audience as commodity, Jhally and Livant (1986) dug deeper into the process of watching and the nature/constitution of this commodity. They argued that although it may seem that audiences have become saleable in reality it is the watching time of the audiences that is sold off to advertisers by the broadcaster.

Whether one takes this line of inquiry that argues that audiences are the sole commodity (Smythe, 1977) or the line that stresses that time or space are sold or rented out to the advertisers (Jhally and Livant, 1986) (Caraway: 2011), it is still the case ratings are critical to broadcasting and these involve a commodity exchange, as several scholars, such as Skornia (1969), Ang (1991) Meehan (1984) have acknowledged.

In Pakistan, the role of ratings in defining gender-based content is crucial because the Pakistani market predominantly runs on this basis. All transactions within the media industry revolve around the daily ratings for the programmes. As Meehan argues (1984: 216), 'the commodity produced, bought, and sold is constituted solely by the ratings'. For Meehan, the broadcasting industry produces message as well as audience but not without the exchange of ratings across different parties involved in production. Therefore, she argues, the smooth functioning of the industry that runs on the exchange of a commodity referred to as ratings, needs manipulation by raters⁴². She notes that in such commercial industries, 'all viewers are not equally in demand and hence not equally profitable to either broadcasters or raters. As a result, raters

⁴² The ratings' companies

that act rationally within the market structure will not measure the public; to do so would be to produce an unsalable commodity.⁴³ Further, she argues 'it would be irrational for broadcasters to program for any viewership other than the fixed and semi-predictable sample...' (1984: 223). In this sense, ratings serve two purposes: one is that of commodity exchange between the clients of the raters (sponsors and broadcasters) and the other responds to the audience's demand for content. However, rating-companies are more interested in the consumers whose labour delivers the ratings which means that the broadcasters are also more interested in producing for their 'semi-predictable sample'. However, I would argue that it is extremely difficult to contain audiences in a fixed category derived from the semi-predictable sample and the 'invisibility' of the audience also makes it far more difficult to define in terms of a single category.

The ratings-driven industry in Pakistan raises some crucial questions for this study, especially in relation to media production: the first is how the semi-predictable sample of audiences impact upon the ethical commitment and creative autonomy of the producers working on the creative side of production. Instead of producing art, *creative workers* (to use Barker and Hesmondhalgh's term, 2011) may face immense pressure from executives within broadcasting to produce for the predictable audience: executives may be obsessed with their predictable audiences or ratings. The second question concerns the stereotyped characteristics of the semi-predictable sample and whether the latter represents a considerable percentage of the total audience? As observed by Napoli (2012: 82), 'it is simply impossible for measurement firms to recruit and maintain representative audience panels that are large enough to capture the true

⁴³ Companies that measure audiences for the market. It is done through people-meters. In the case of Pakistan, Media Logic is the only audience-measurement company that records its readings through peoples-meter. Before Media Logic, Gallup used to record viewing habits through diaries.

distribution of audience attention across the wealth of available content options and across all of the platforms via which content can be consumed.

Nevertheless, despite the limitations of the sample used in ratings, especially in terms of its representativeness, the television industry in Pakistan heavily depends upon ratings. This raises concern with regard to the gap between the perception of the producers about their consumers and the actual public.

It is also important to think in terms of the labour that audiences are involved in, and to note that simply because it can be quantified/sold does not mean that execution of this work is also simple. I argue that the media industry invites audiences to perform multiple forms of labour. In this, I take a lead from Shimpach who understands labour in the following manner:

Labor is a productive means by which to understand the contemporary audience in political terms. Articulated to discourses of labor, the audience takes on new political salience. The focus on the labor of becoming an audience suggests significant possibilities for redefining the role of agency and the relations of power. At the same time, focusing on the labor of becoming an audience places the products of the culture industries in a new context, wherein their ownership is open to broader interpretation and their cultural significance and “effects” are a function of the work done to encounter them as much or more than the messages embedded or encoded within them. (Shimpach, 2005: 359)

Thus the act of reception involves audiences’ work at multiple levels and each level offers a separate line of inquiry in academic research; however, there are overlaps, and working/watching takes place at the same time, where an audience maybe rendering its services as a commodity, decoding dominant/implied meaning, critically evaluating the text and trying to build an understanding of how it relates to his/her context. More importantly, all of this cannot be abstracted from audiences’ subject positions and their roles as agents

who also work independently of the structural constraints. Even if producers have their own agenda viewers can fall into the category of public as well as consumer. Yet since audiences are invisible and hard to locate in their contexts of viewing, the media industry only respond to the tastes of those who can be measured.

2.6: Conclusion:

The chapter has provided the theoretical toolkit for conducting this research. By using the Western concepts of publics, cultural citizenship, the public sphere and the political economy of media, the study will explore agendas of producers and engagement patterns of female viewers. The concept of 'publics' will be useful in exploring how Pakistani women can be understood in terms of intersecting identities, whereas the practices of cultural citizenship will allow to understand the emergence of counter publics. In this sense, the concepts of publics and cultural citizenship are also interlinked. Using the theoretical discussion above, the study will evaluate how female viewers engage bearing in mind the role of 'subjectivities' in their engagement. While exploring this role, the study will take into account the variables of family system (joint or nuclear), religious inclination, class and age (see Chapter, 4 and 7). Moreover, it will find out how different attributes enable viewers to engage in pre-civic to pro-civic ways (see Chapter, 7).

The debate on 'commodity question' will facilitate the discussion on the importance of ratings' driven sample that may or may not be a part of the viewing public. In addition, it will also raise the issue of finding a public within the sample audience (see Chapter 5). The model of public sphere will inform the study in relation to 'episodic' public spheres created in interactive shows and the way public sphering unfolds in post-viewing discussions (see Chapter 7).

Chapter 3 will share research methods chosen for this project.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction:

This chapter aims to give an overview of research design for this study.

Appreciating the density and the scope of the topic, I used a multi-method approach for this study where each method was used to have a better understanding of production and reception of gendered content. The methods employed in this study are: brief survey, interviews and the focus groups. The fieldwork for this study was conducted from October 2011 to April 2012.

Considering the complexity of this project, I attempted to use a combination of methods in this research and the fieldwork was conducted in three stages. The first stage involved the planning of the fieldwork, and selecting the appropriate groups of viewers for the focus groups and interviewees on the production side; the second stage involved conducting interviews of the producers, while the third stage targeted conducting the focus groups among the selected viewers.

The nature of the content in question was such that I wanted all the participants in this research to speak openly on gender-based issues in society and how they relate to the gendered discourses on screen. For that, it was obvious to opt for the methods that allow full participation of the respondents in a way that they not only participate in identifying the issues but also relate it to the social realities that surround them. As an insider to the society, and specifically as a woman who has spent 22 years in Pakistan, I have approached this study from the feminist perspective. I was looking forward to participants' accounts on their own stories *about* and *in relation to* socially constructed realities *around them* and *on screen*. As anticipated, semi-structured interviews/discussions allowed that space where participants, whether in one-

to-one interviews or in the focus groups engaged interpreting the content in question. Such an approach favours the researcher, who wants to understand different versions of realities through participants' accounts/stories.

'Constructing interviews from a feminist perspective can mean coupling feminist research methods with feminist standpoint epistemology, challenging researchers to 'understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women' (Brooks, 2007:53 in Seale, 2012). By that, I do not mean to imply that I necessarily had 'oppressed women' in my sample, but most of them were not participating in the public life of the society and were in many ways hard to approach. Also, a few of them were also subjugated within their homes. Interestingly, the context in which the research was conducted also allowed an insight into their family structure.

The sections that follow will give you an overview of the methods used and their appropriateness for this study.

3.2: Interviews:

Most research projects are either situated in the paradigm of production or reception studies, but this study aimed to look at the motivations/agendas of producers as well as responses of viewers. For this section, I had conducted around 42 interviews, but I am using extracts from 40 interviews and the time duration for each interview ranged between one to two hours.⁴⁴ This section will give the reader a close insight into the journey towards selecting the interviewees. It was not a matter of having a few important names (that I already had in the beginning of the research) in the industry; in fact, it was an interesting journey of finding the 'right' people as interviewees.

⁴⁴ The two I have not used are those that I have lost due to technical problem in the audio-recorder. Although I took notes along with recording but I prefer to use the transcripts that I have complete notes on.

These producers were contacted through a friend who is working as an Assistant Vice President for ARY News Channel. The aim for the production side was to get in touch with the producers of the selected case studies. In the planning stage of the fieldwork, I did not aim for 40 interviews, but the findings of the interviews and the focus groups opened up new areas for exploration, and it seemed advisable to engage with those on the marketing side of production rather than to have limited data, which may or may not be reliable. Despite having more data, a researcher cannot be certain 'whether or not there is any ultimate 'reality' to be communicated, the interviewee may have incomplete knowledge and faulty memory. They will always have subjective perceptions that will be related to their own past experiences and current conditions. At best, interviewees will only give what they are prepared to reveal about their subjective perceptions of events and opinions. These perceptions and opinions will change over time, and according to circumstance. They may be at some considerable distance from 'reality' as others might see it.' (Walford, 2007: 147) The best possible way to overcome any gaps in the findings and to have a clear picture on how encoding of gender takes place, I tried to interview not only *the content heads* working in broadcasting channels but also *the writers* and *the directors* who worked in production homes.

The preparation of each interview involved formulating questions and also aiming for some structure, but soon after the first interview I realised that it should be executed in an informal conversation style. All of these interviews were conducted keeping in view the 'essential qualities which the successful interviewer must possess: an interest and respect to people as individuals, and flexibility in response to them; an ability to show understanding and sympathy for their point of view; and above all, a willingness to sit quietly and listen' (Thompson, 1988: 196 quoted in Byrne, 2012). Not only were these characteristics kept in mind but also the fact that in the Pakistani culture people tend to

speak/tell their stories/opinions more than listening to others, and at times can be very assertive in reinforcing their opinions on certain issues. Therefore, despite keeping these interviews in a conversational style, it was mostly about letting the interviewee speak more, and similar to how Les Back argues that 'listening to the world is not an automatic faculty but a skill that needs to be trained'. (2007: 7 quoted in Byrne, 2012), I also had to pick this trait up in a way that, without offending the interviewee, I tried to direct the discussion in a certain direction. After every interview, I also reviewed each audio-recordings immediately afterwards, to think about the gaps/barriers in the following interview.

One of the important barriers in a discussion can be that of power relation between the interviewer and the interviewee, and also within a group discussion, but in 'face-to-face communication, power refers to the act of "powerful participant's controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participant"' (Fairclough 2001:39). During the course of this research, it was also realised that informal structure of the interviews can overcome the *hierarchical issues* between the interviewer and the interviewee. Ann Oakley (1981:41) makes this argument that the 'goal of finding about people is best achieved when the relationship of the interviewer-interviewee is non-hierarchical', but that too does not guarantee that one would get the complete version of desired information. In fact, as a researcher working on qualitative methods, I had to carefully assess the silence, body language and most importantly expressions of interviewees, the importance of reading silence/body language was also appreciated while conducting *one* telephone interview⁴⁵. It is a known method to approach those who are 'otherwise difficult to access in person' (Tausig and Freeman, 1988: 420 quoted in Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004: 109). Those researchers who have used

⁴⁵ During the fieldwork, I could not contact her and I have also been told by others in the industry that she does not give face-to-face interviews. Therefore, when I travelled back to the UK, this writer entertained my call and explained that she prefers telephonic interviews.

telephonic interview as a research method suggest that one may analyse 'whether the lack of visual cues is critical to data quality and whether there are any compensating features of telephone interviewing' (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004: 114). During the telephonic interview and even afterwards (listening to the transcript), it was almost impossible to assess whether interviewee was comfortable with the questions or not. It seemed that the ideas that emerged through the transcript were lacking in coherence and the interviewee was a little reserved (wanting to be politically correct) in her responses.

In this stage of fieldwork, some *ethical questions* emerged when interviewees wanted to speak off-the-record about several variables that affect the gender-based content in Pakistani television. Anything to do with religion, especially was asked to be anonymised, but within such talks emerged strong individual opinions that opened up many other lines of inquiry within this study. Such semi-structured methods are used by those 'who come from an ontological position which respects people's knowledge, values and experiences as meaningful and worthy of exploration' (Byrne, 2012: 208).

All these interviews were recorded through a digital recorder and were conducted in offices of interviewees, with exception to one writer (as mentioned above) whose interview was conducted on telephone but it was also recorded on digital audio recorder, and notes were taken throughout the interview. In a few cases, interviewees found the presence of digital recorder obtrusive and they were more relaxed when it was turned off, and would come out openly on many issues, however, notes were taken for the off-the-record conversations too.

One-to-one interviews seemed to be an appropriate method to approach producers working in the industry and the *selection* of these producers was based on several factors. The first obvious reason was to assess their relevance to the content in question, and also their control over production of the gendered content. However, during the fieldwork, it was discovered that to have better

understanding of the dynamics of production, it is mandatory to get in touch with people who may be in a position to reveal the 'hidden agendas' of the producers. I was introduced to a few producers through one of my friends (Fawwad Khan) who is working in the industry, but all other interviewees were approached through snowballing technique. In the following section, I will give an overview of the categories of producers interviewed, but for their names please refer to Appendix 4.

A. Interviews of producers/directors who worked for PTV: Since this project is about the change that came about after 2002, I thought it was worth considering what the producers of drama serials (who once worked for the state channel and are now working for the private channels) have to say about this change. So, I began the fieldwork with this category and I got in touch with eight producers/directors who had experience of over twenty years of working with the state channel. During the interviews with the producers/directors, an argument that remained constant was that when it comes to drama serials, television was more of a writers' medium than a directors', and therefore one must take on board the views of the writers who were given one-liners by PTV's management to write on certain gender-based issues.⁴⁶

Some crucial issues under discussion in this category of interviewees focussed upon: (a) how gendered content evolved over the years and with what motivation/intention; (b) what are the ethical dimensions of production of such content in state television; (c) how do audiences engage with television content and (d) whether narrative/interactive genres in recent years can bring some change in relation to gender-based issues or not.

⁴⁶ One-liners are the orders from above (in this case either General Manager PTV or the government) to write on a particular topic.

B. Interviews of writers/directors/producers of drama serials who are now working for the private channels:

I tried approaching interviewees falling under the genre of drama serials from three angles. I got in touch with the *seven writers* whose scripts are highly gender-centric and whose work is popular among the female viewers. These writers, like many others are mostly approached by big *Production Homes* in Pakistan with a clear line to write something for the female viewers who are typical housewives; however, there was a general sentiment among all the writers that *Productions Homes* have almost turned into factories. Along with the questions already raised in the section above, further questions probed along the lines, such as (a) who determines the trends for one-liners, (b) why do writers seem obsessed with home-oriented narratives and also marriage/divorces, (c) what sort of viewers writers have in mind (d) whether their narratives have the potential to change some attitudes or not.

Along with these writers, in this category, I also got in touch with *two upcoming* directors who are working for private production homes. The aim was engage in conversation with these two directors to have a better understanding of production of drama serials. The issues raised with these directors involved sensitive topics such as casting couch and how ratings directly affects production of certain types of soft wares (drama serials). Apart from the writers, I got in touch with the CEOs of *three* production giants that enjoy the monopoly in this area. With these interviewees, all aspects of production of drama serials were brought under discussion; however, important highlights of these interviews were about 'who (writers/broadcasters/sponsors) determines the concepts for drama serials' and 'what is their motivation is producing content on 'miseries of women'.

C. Interviews of Content Head/ Concept Head in four channels of Pakistan:

The Content Heads/Concept Heads are the people who would pick and choose the scripts for the drama serials. In this category, I got in touch with *four* Content Heads in four channels (Geo, ARY, Hum TV, Express Ent) and the conversation with them also raised similar concerns about how they are brought under pressure to select sellable ideas rather than healthy ideas for their channels.

D. Interviews of Heads/CEO of top three channels in Pakistan:

Since a number of producers expressed their concerns over the pressure they receive in relation to ratings from the channels' management, I preferred getting in touch with the Heads of *three of the* most popular television channels (GEO TV, ARY Digital and Hum TV) to comment on this trend. Interestingly, the CEOs of the channels also mentioned about the stress they face in terms of ratings, and how the Marketing/Sales Heads of the channels push them towards certain easily sellable trends. Therefore, the question for this area in particular examined questions such as (a) whether private broadcasters have a certain mandate or not (b) how would private broadcasters define responsibility/commitment towards society.

E. Interviews of Heads of Sales and Marketing/Business Unit Heads of three top-rated channels in Pakistan:

To have a better understanding of the process/trend of ratings and how it influences the production of gender-based content, I explored this dimension further with the Sales Heads of *three* channels (Geo, ARY, Hum), who were quite explicit about their commitment towards the commercial organisations.

Since the Head of Sales/Marketing in these channels were somewhat defensive about their approach towards the 'role of media', I probed this line of inquiry further with Senior Manager Sales in Hum TV and Head of Marketing Geo TV. In interviews with *five people* in this category, the aim was to understand how channels work closely with their sponsors.

F. Interviews of producers three top-rated gender-based talk shows in Pakistan:

As part of this project, I had to interview producers/content heads/anchors of the *two* case studies for religion-based talk shows dealing with gender-based issues and *one* for the social-issues based talk show. My first case study was *Alim aur Alam*, which is supposed to be a popular programme in the Pakistani television culture. I had two sittings with Amir Liaquat Hussain, who is the host and also the producer of this show, and each conversation lasted approximately *two hours*. He also allowed me to spend *one* day in his office to observe how his team worked during the live-show. I used this opportunity to understand the system of filtering the calls and the text-messages that are passed on to the live show. The second case study for this genre was *Hawa ki Baiti*, a talk-show that can be classified as religion-based talk show addressing gender-issues in particular. For this show, head of religion-based programmes who was also the head of concept for this show, was interviewed.

The third case study for this category was *Geo Hina kay Sath*, a social-issues based talk that addressed gender-based issues for over five years. Unlike other interviews, this interview lasted three hours with conversation touching upon issues that hosts/producers face in speaking about gender-based issues on screen. For these genres, the emphasis was on such questions; (a) whether

engagement with such shows can empower women in certain ways (b) what sort of motivation drives gender-based content of these shows (c) do they think that such shows do have the potential to bring about a change in attitudes or not.

G. Interviews of crime-based talk show/re-enactment shows:

While conducting the focus groups, a trend of 'watching crime shows' emerged among all the classes. This also tells us how the findings of a research can also have a role to play in channelising further research work. During my fieldwork in Karachi, I discovered that the female viewers often condemn such content as disturbing, but followed it on a regular basis. I found out that *Shabbir Toh Dekhay Ga* (Shabbir Will Watch) and *Jurm Bolta Hae* (Crime Speaks) are the most popular crime shows among the female viewers. Therefore, I interviewed the producers of these *two* shows. The victims (from the rural areas) get in touch with these shows through letters. After some reluctance, they agreed to give me access to the *letters* that they receive from the female victims who seek protection through these shows. Their reluctance was based on the fact that the producers of the crime shows deal with cases of sensitive nature and for ethical reasons, they did not want to share details of the cases. For *Shabbir Toh Dekhay Ga*, I was given access to *110 letters* from which I selected about *25 letters* that reported gender-based crime. For ethical reasons, I will not be using the findings of these letters in this study; however, these letters were useful in terms of giving an insight into the kind of cases reported under gender-centric crimes. Moreover, it also clarified the question who accesses the mediated public sphere, who represents it and for what purposes. In most cases, the gender-based crime is either about rape that eventually leads to murder or honour killing for women. The main aim in conversations with these two producers was to understand; (a) what is the motivation behind bringing the

gender-based violence on these shows; (b) in what ways can it benefit or be helpful for the victims as well as for the female viewers; (c) whether these shows have impulses for change/empowering women or not (d) whether these shows can facilitate the judiciary in any way.

H. Interviews of producers/anchors of top-rated Breakfast Shows in Pakistan:

In this category, *six* interviews were conducted with hosts of breakfast shows of different channels. The aim was to fully understand the motivation behind taking up gender-crimes as a point for discussion on morning shows. With an exception to one host, who was not willing to give time (interview lasted 18 minutes), the interviews with other hosts turned out to be very effective in terms of findings, and the conversations lasted more than one hour. The questions in this category focussed upon (a) whether breakfast shows can facilitate the system for speedy trial/draw society's attention towards gender-based crimes or not (b) do these spaces trivialise such issues (c) whether women engage with issues of serious nature or not.

G. CEO of Media Logic:

To understand why everyone in the industry is so carried away with the popular demand that is determined through ratings, I arranged a meeting with the **CEO of Media Logic** (the only company that generates audience data through people meter⁴⁷) to understand how it works. After 15 minutes, interviewee refused to speak on record and therefore notes were taken for this interview. The obvious presence of the audio recorder made this interviewee uncomfortable. This interview was conducted to understand how the system of

⁴⁷ See for example: Merriam Webster Online, Available at: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/people%20meter> (Accessed: July, 3, 2014)

ratings works in Pakistan and what are the recent trends in ratings that determine the production of certain gender-based content.

3.3 Focus groups:

This study has used the ethnographic approach for analysing the audience reception. 'The ethnographic audience research is constructed on the basis that audiences are different, active and selective, but also influenced by social, cultural and economic factors with their environment.' (Ivala, 2007: 37). By combining observation with the focus group interviews, I have attempted to understand how audiences appropriate the gender-based content. To have a coherent picture of what is driving gendered content in Pakistani television, conducting one-to-one interviews became an obvious choice for the producers' perspective, but for the area on '**how women make sense of/appropriate this change**', the focus groups seemed to have more relevancy rather than individual interviews. It is already a widely used method to access those who may otherwise be uncomfortable in a dyadic situation, and since the project was largely addressing the issues about realities of the social context, this method was considered to be appropriate for the participants are not abstracted from their social contexts.

The ethnographic approach towards reading audiences emphasises the importance of the context and 'insists that being an audience (or "doing audiencing" or "consuming technologies") should not be abstracted from its social context.' (Kitzinger, 2004: 178). In this sense, focus groups create a site for arguments/rhetoric, where new set of meanings emerge through interaction/exchange of different stories/accounts in a comfortable environment. However, it does not imply that the focus shifts from an individual to the context only, rather it highlights individual's account in relation to his/her

social context. It is also true that the non-hierarchical nature of this method can lead to a situation of chaos during discussion, where participants can even become loud to suppress other voices and can even stress upon issues that may not be entirely relevant to the original topic. This is also noted by Sue Wilkinson who mentions 'In the *data collection* stage at least, the researcher's power and influence is reduced, because she has much less power and influence over a group than over an individual.' (Wilkinson, 1998: 114) Richard Krueger (1998:46) also warns that lack of control on part of the researcher 'results in some inefficiencies such as detours in the discussion, and the raising of irrelevant issues.' I tried my best to avoid any situations but in some instances, I had to intervene with a direct question on the topic.

After a lot of consideration, I opted for focus groups as a desired method for seeking audience responses as opposed to the in-depth individual interviews. As a researcher, who intended to reach out to a set of people who are otherwise separated from the public life of Pakistan, I wanted to use a method that offers a comfortable setting for the viewers as opposed to one-to-one interviews which can at times be a little intimidating for the ones interviewed and also the fact that this method offers the opportunity to have more participants' representation than traditional interviews. Since 'inhibitions often are relaxed in group situations, and the more natural environment prompts increased candor by respondents' (Krueger 1994: 148-49), this method turned out to be effective for it is a combination of 'participant observation and in-depth interviewing' (Morgan and Spanish in Krueger, 1994: 35). It is also known that 'focus groups are ideal for exploring people's experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns. 'The method is particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary' (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999: 5).

Not all respondents knew each other but there were many things in common, mainly their viewing habits and lifestyles were similar, and therefore most of them felt confident in sharing their views. The importance of homogeneity in the group was appreciated when discussions/findings were thwarted by the presence of 'one unwanted person' (usually mothers-in-law), which resulted in conducting groups again without such a presence. This was just to avoid any situation, which made participants uncomfortable and not willing to speak, which could even lead to strong disagreements. Usually, this is avoided through participant selection in which all participants are strangers to each other; however, in reality it is very difficult to have all participants unknown to each other.

Targetting the participants for focus groups is a complicated task in any research. Earlier it was planned to get in touch with a local audience research company such as Gallup or Media Logic. Due to ethical reasons, the company refused to give access to contact details of the viewers, therefore, **snowballing**, turned out to be only way to access the viewers. Since the project is mapping the change in the gendered content and the issue raised in it, focus groups were divided into two broad categories on the basis of class/income and age. In each income group, are two sub-categories, Middle-Aged and Young, based on age, with Middle-Aged, referring to those who have seen the transition of Pakistani television, while Young, referring to those who have *only* watched Pakistani television in post-liberalisation era. All these groups are conducted exclusively in the Urdu speaking community of Karachi.

As per the original plan, I was supposed to conduct **24** groups in total with **6** in each category but I had to increase the groups per category for I wanted to be sure that I had relevant data. In total, I conducted **32** groups.

There were two broad categories on the basis of class/income groups and localities. While aiming for 'purposive sampling', I used a small questionnaire for the respondents in each group. The questionnaires were filled in prior to the discussion to sort out the common traits among the respondents; it was then made sure that the group should be as homogeneous as possible so that the readings become as reflective of a like-minded group of people as was possible. After name, age and education, each questionnaire had five questions which are given as follows:

- A. What kind of daily media consumption you have?
- B. Are there any programmes that you would never miss?
- C. Where do you keep your television, bedroom or lounge?
- D. Do you watch television with other members of your family? Is there any such thing as a family viewing on your home?
- E. Who has the control over the remote control?

This quantitative information was used to complement the qualitative research methods. It also gave an insight into the power dynamics involved in family viewing. Apart from these questions, there were some essential questions about education and income and age. According to the Pakistani education system; intermediate is equivalent of (Grade Twelve/A levels), 14 years education is equivalent to a college graduate; 16 years is an equivalent of university graduate.

This study faced difficulties in placing groups into strict socio-economic categories due to limited of knowledge of their accurate monthly income. Unfortunately, the participants were also not keen to reveal their monthly income and this is purely for cultural reasons. Finding an answer to the

monthly income of a household is supposed to be offensive in Pakistani culture. Being an insider to the society, I had some idea of their socio-economic class, but this knowledge was supplemented with the help of those who helped in coordinating with the participants. These coordinators (sharing the same neighbourhood) gave a clear idea of the possible income of these groups, and in very few cases, women even indicated their monthly income.

Like any other study, this one also had some limitations; it was almost impossible to make all variables match in each group. For instance, most of the respondents lived in the joint family system, however, there were a few who also lived in a nuclear family system. The planning of these groups was conducted before leaving for the fieldwork and according to the original plan it was decided that these groups will be conducted among the women of 'upper middle class based in Clifton and Defence Housing Authority area of Karachi' and 'domestic maids', preferably Bengali/Siraiki women who work as house maids in their homes. To execute this plan, I conducted several focus groups among the Siraiki community. After conducting three groups with 15 women in Taiser Town, I realised that I needed to rethink my selection of respondents for a couple of reasons, first; despite living in Karachi for a long time, these women were not too fluent in Urdu (local/national language), I found it extremely difficult to understand their dialect, second; these women were also not so keen on Pakistani television culture, and the reason for this turned to be that Pakistani television does not offer anything similar to the Indian soaps. A few women were also clear about the fact that they were not interested to watch narratives/plots that were too dense to watch, and also because the Indian soaps offered them an escape from their daily routines. However, a couple of women revealed that they were interested in crime shows, for the crime rate is high in their locality and they could relate to the cases. I decided to overcome the barrier of language/communication and conduct groups exclusively in Urdu

speaking community.⁴⁸ Using the approach of 'purposive sampling', the selection was narrowed down to the 'housewives' who were supposed to be the targeted audience of the producers in the field.

Each group had a minimum of four respondents and a maximum of six, it was not preferred to increase the number of respondents because I wanted each respondent to participate fully. In very few cases, where groups had six members, and not all falling in a similar age group, I had to balance the group with a relatively young member. The **duration** of each group was between 50 minutes to two hours in cases where the discussion continued over refreshments and dinner.

For the **compensation**, the community living in New Karachi were not comfortable with the idea of 'getting paid' for the focus groups; in fact, I was given the understanding that it could also be quite offensive to a few. Therefore, keeping this in mind, dinner was arranged (post-discussion). Interestingly, it turned out to be a 'time for more discussion' in a more relaxed/casual environment, where participants who found it difficult to speak in a controlled setting came out more openly with their thoughts on content. The community living in Ancholi was approached through an acquaintance who requested for a compensation of £100 but cold drinks were also served during the focus groups. High tea was arranged for the participants in Sohni Chalet. These members found it extremely offensive to get compensated for sharing their views; in fact they even disapproved the 'idea of having tea'.

⁴⁸ Urdu is the national language of Pakistan, but it is also the language of the migrant community (*muhajir*) from India. At the time of Partition, the majority of this community settled in the Sindh province and mainly in Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur. Urdu is widely spoken and understood in Pakistan.

3.3.1: Overview of the groups in Lower Middle Class

A. Lower Middle Class (New Karachi):

For the groups to be conducted in Lower Middle Class, I approached the Urdu speaking community living in New Karachi, a *Muhajir*/Urdu speaking majority locality based in the northern part of Karachi. The monthly income for almost all the groups was around 15000-25000 PKR. It may be noted that women were not keen to reveal the monthly income of their households; however, I figured it out from my driver, who not only helped in getting access to this community but had provided his house as a place to conduct these groups. All of these groups were conducted in the 'drawing room/visitors' room'. In total, **14 groups** were conducted in this locality, **eight** among the Lower Middle Class (Middle Aged) and **six** among the Lower Middle Class (Young).

In the groups falling under **Lower Middle Class Young**, there were **27** participants in **six** groups, and average education for this category was intermediate (Grade Twelve/High School). The age group for this category ranged between 18-26, where most women were living with their in-laws; however, there were **5** women who were unmarried. In this category, **15** respondents (55.5%) claimed that male members of the family have the control over the remote control during the prime time, while **18** respondents (66.6 %) mentioned that they avoid watching television with male members and the same percentage said to have their TV in the lounge.

Among the groups within **Lower Middle Class Middle-Aged**, there were **32** respondents spread over **8** groups, and the average education for this category was under matriculation (Grade Ten). The age group for this category was between 35-55 (as told by the respondents); however, most of these

participants were not too certain about their accurate age. All of them were married and many were even mothers-in-law living in joint family structures. In this sample, in 12 households (37.2%), the male members have control over the remote during the prime time, while 16 respondents (50%) mentioned that anyone in the family could have the remote. It is also observed that 78.1 % of this sample with 25 participants enjoyed watching television with families during the prime time, and almost 53 % of the sample had their television in the lounge, while others had it in their own bedrooms.⁴⁹

A. Lower Middle Class (Korangi):

For crime shows in particular, I approached the Urdu speaking community living in Korangi, where a total of **five** groups were conducted among the 18 respondents. The monthly income for this set of viewers ranged from 15000 – 20000 PKR, and the average education for this sample was under Matriculation (Tenth Grade). Again, the age bracket for this sample is once again not so accurate for either women were not comfortable to share their real age or they did not have any idea about their age; however, all of them were above 35 years of age, and were mostly keen on crime shows. In these groups, most of participants lived in shared accommodation with extended families, and each family had a single bedroom, therefore, they did not have any lounge/communal area as their place of viewing and 72.2 % (13 respondents) had the television in their bedrooms, with 9 participants (50%) mentioning that their husbands keep remotes in their hands, 16 participants (88.8 %) watch television (specifically crime shows) together as a family.

3.3.2 Overview of Groups in Middle Class:

⁴⁹ The abbreviation for the Lower Middle Class Middle Aged will be LM Middle-Aged
The abbreviation for the Lower Middle Class Young will LM Young

A. Middle Class Middle-Aged (Sohni):

Initially, for the groups in Middle Class Middle-Aged, I had selected Sohni Chalet, a housing compound where a sample size of **20** women in **five** groups had a majority (15) above 50 years of age, which suited my plan of seeking responses of those women who had seen the development of television industry in Pakistan. Except for 2, all of the respondents had qualification above graduation. The monthly income of these respondent ranges from 80, 000-150,000 PKR. Most of these women belonged to the Urdu speaking community, however, **three** respondents were non-Urdu speaking. The residential colony where they lived cannot be considered as an overwhelming Urdu speaking/Muhajir community area. Ten participants (50%) have the control over remote/viewing during the prime time and nine respondents (45%) revealed that they do not prefer watching TV with other family members. In this sample, almost all of members had more than one television set, and in some cases had a separate television for each bedroom along with one in a lounge.

A. Middle Class Elderly (Ancholi):

While conducting groups among Middle Class Middle Aged respondents of Sohni Chalet, I could figure out that this locality will not represent a typical Urdu speaking community. Therefore, I approached a coordinator in Ancholi, an area that turned out to be ethnically homogeneous and almost all of the respondents were typical housewives. The monthly income of these groups ranged between 50,000-100,000 PKR. The set of **seven groups** had **28** participants, all of whom were at least college graduates and most of them were living in the joint family systems. Fifteen participants (53.5%) mentioned that the male members determine the viewing practices during the prime time, while 16 (57.1%) said they watch television together with other family members

during the prime time. All of them had one television set in lounge, however 18 respondents (64%) also had television sets in their bedrooms.

A. Middle Class Young (University of Karachi University):

In this particular category, there were **42** participants in **ten** groups with four to six members in each group. All of these groups were conducted in the Arts Lobby and in Mehmud Hussain Library at the University of Karachi. Being an ex-student of this university, it was easier to get in touch with the students of social sciences and even other disciplines. Most of the members in this category were enthusiastic to become part of such a discussion on gendered content, therefore finding participants for this category was not so difficult. Almost half (50%) of the students in this sample here, mentioned that male members of the family keep remote control with them during the prime time and the same percentage has the television set in the lounge; 27 respondents (64%) watch television with other family members.

3.4: Transcribing data:

Following Barbour (2007), I would also agree that there is no single/widely approved formula for transcribing and coding data. And interestingly, in the findings of this research, there were several surprising elements that made coding frame more flexible.

In the first stage of transcribing, most of the data was transcribed in the form of notes taken during recording and conducting the interviews and the focus groups. It was later formally transcribed through listening to the audios and a fieldwork report of approximately 80,000 words was developed. The second stage of transcribing was the stage of 'data reduction' (McLellan, Mac Queen, Neidig: 2003). The data reduced was that which did not fall into the scope of this study or where participants had completely diverted from the topic, but I

did not discard the written notes about visual cues, body language and gestures that were equally important to reinforce any ideas about identity construction and social meanings. In the third stage of transcribing the data, the thorough examination of the fieldwork was undertaken to identify the 'patterns of association and variation' (to use Tonkin's term). On the basis of these patterns of association and variation, I developed a summary report that highlighted the key findings of the fieldwork. These patterns were developed out of the semi-structured questions for the interviews and focus group. For the producers' side, the findings were divided on the basis of the genre. Based on each genre, the responses were classified under such headings: Ethical Question in bringing gender-based issues; engagement patterns and social change; breaking stereotypes; perception of the producers about their audiences; recalling PTV; *dupatta* policy; issue of the ratings; reality in the gender-based content; initiating a debate/openness in the content; empowering women or bringing change through content. Under similar headings, the responses of the viewers were also divided on the basis of their groups.

3.5: Ethical Question:

The ethical question in any research becomes relevant while dealing with humans as the subject. Before departing to conduct the fieldwork, I received an official letter from the School of Media, Film and Music (Sussex) as proof of my registration for the research programme. Although I made certain that I carried my Student ID and the official letter everywhere, as I went about conducting interviews and the focus groups, no one, except for the producers of the crime shows asked for proof of my identification. This can also be associated to one of the cultural issues in Pakistan where it is considered offensive to ask a woman for her official ID. It could also be that the references that I used (Fawwad Khan) were so credible that no one questioned my identity, or asked for proof.

However, there were certain issues that were raised during the fieldwork. On the production side, the producers of the crime shows and religion-based talk shows were sceptical about the true intention for this research. The concern was not that I am working in the West, but that I could be working *for* the West. These producers needed reassurance that my agenda was nothing more than to successfully complete research work for a doctoral project. They also expressed disquiet over the likelihood the research findings being used to tarnish the image of Pakistan. Nevertheless, these concerns did not deter even a single producer from talking to me.

The distrust in the West was also evident when I got in touch with the University students. Despite their willingness to talk to me on gender-based issues, they expressed their misgivings, wondering out loud if the findings of this research might be used against Muslims and Pakistan. At times, it seemed that they were somewhat careful in discussing certain issues. Their main concern was why the West (in general) wants to know all that is defective in Pakistan. Although I have lived in Karachi for 22 years, they treated me as an outsider, and as someone with a foreign agenda. At the same time, a few wanted to participate in this research, in the hope that through this research, they can perhaps send out a positive message across (to the West). These sentiments have roots in the rising religiosity in Pakistan. The localities of Ancholi, Korangi and New Karachi were far more conservative than the residential colony of Sohni Chalet. Out of sheer respect for the culture of the areas of Ancholi, New Karachi and Korangi, I covered myself with a *hijab*, and in some cases, also a *chador*. With regard to the ethical concerns, the respondents also requested that their names be anonymised in the final draft. While commenting on religion and *muta* (temporary marriage) in particular, there were also two writers who requested that their names be anonymised in

the final draft (see for example Chapter 6). I assured them, and have indeed ensured that the names of the two writers, and those of all of the respondents for the focus group are not used.

3.6 Conclusion:

This chapter looked into the research design of this project. I have shared my multi-method approach used to extract data for my research question. The first half of the question (*why has the content in relation to gender changed so dramatically in Pakistani television since 'liberalisation'*) was addressed through interviews, while the second half (*and how do women engage with and make sense of this changed content?*) was addressed through focus groups. In doing so, I have also reflected on my own intersecting identities as an insider to the society, a Muslim, Pakistani and a feminist willing to understand gender-based issues through the eyes of female viewers. My fieldwork in different neighbourhoods of Karachi made me more aware of the role subjectivities play in women's appropriation of gendered content. Chapter 4 and 6 will familiarise the readers with the data retrieved from producers' interviews on commodity question and agendas for bringing change in gendered content. Chapter 5 and 7 will turn to the material produced in focus groups to address how women interpret gendered content in terms of 'openness' and 'how they respond to the emancipatory potential of the changed content.'

Chapter 4

Openness in gender-based content

The title of this chapter is 'Openness in gender-based content'. During the fieldwork, the phrase 'openness in gendered content' emerged when the producers and the viewers commented on the overall nature of the transition in gendered content. Therefore, this chapter evaluates how participants to this research understand the change in gender-based content through identifying certain trends or without deeper engagement with the particular case studies. In other words, it seeks to understand what mainly defines the *transition* in content for them. During the interviews and the focus groups, the recurring concern for the viewers as well as for some producers has been that the gender-based content is somewhat open. The term *openness* in the gender-based content is hard to define for it does not imply a single trend but rather includes multiple trends that seek to define the gender dynamics on screen and that have affected viewers' responses to this content. The viewers' data leads this term; their usage of this term does not imply the liberalisation of the market rather it is used in relation to the content. The word used in the local language for open is '*khula*'. Translated literally, it can mean anything that is *not* concealed. In the local language the phrase used for such content is '*sab kuch itna khula hogya hae*' (everything is so open). This is used to refer to the issues that should culturally be concealed, silenced or walled off; or it is used for the issues that fall into the domain of *sharam* (shame). The whole idea of openness cannot be understood unless juxtaposed with concealment or what falls into the category of shame. Shame is an ambivalent concept in the Pakistani society. It can refer to several things; Alvi (2013:178) rightly defines this ambiguous concept of *sharam* in this manner:

Sharam as a term, is 'far richer than its usual English translation "shame," which is often associated with *modesty, morality, piety, and female sexuality and its control.*'

She explores additional meanings of *sharam* for the Pakistani context, 'as aspects of concealment as a value, *like nakedness of humans* and sacred items, virginity, beauty in concealment, *honor in responsibility and as embodied self-control*, affinity, self-respect, dignity, pride, reverence for the other, self-sufficiency, vulnerability, security and protection, *embarrassment*, an obligation to be humble, humiliation, *shyness, reservedness, restraint, as well as women of the house, in particular, daughter and sister*.⁵⁰

From Alvi's definition, it is apparent that the domain of *sharam* is not only dense but also vague. When certain practices transcend or negotiate the boundaries of *sharam*, they are labelled as open or bold⁵¹. Although bold and open can be used interchangeably for such content, I prefer to use the term open that literally translates into *khula* (the word used by the viewers).

I cannot not deal with all the aspects of openness in this project⁵². Therefore, openness in terms of the gender-based content refers to three issues in this project. Firstly; it refers to losing modesty and abandoning *dupatta* that covers the chest, secondly; it refers to the use of language that is offensive for family viewing in the lounge⁵³, thirdly; it is related to subjects that are considered taboos in the Pakistani society. Of course, there can be many taboos in Pakistani society, but I am primarily focusing on the taboos in relation to gender-based issues. These focus on representation of issues such as incest, prostitution, homosexuality and sexual ambivalence that are considered inappropriate for discussion in an Islamic society.

⁵⁰ Italicised are those meanings that closely relate to this project

⁵¹ Also note that the term 'bold' is also used in positive sense when attributed to women

⁵² Feminine hygiene and representation of women in advertisements was also raised as bold and open in terms of content. But, I choose not to incorporate those finding in this project.

⁵³ Lounge is the word commonly for reception room or the family room.

This chapter will set the stage for viewers' engagement with the content of programmes. Here the discussion mainly focuses on how liberalisation in content triggers the practices of restraint and disciplining among the viewers, with viewers also tending to resist this content by disowning representations and themes. The discussion is divided into four sections; the first section explores memories of the state channel. In this section, viewers recall PTV and try to compare the content of the state channel to that of the commercial broadcasters. The second section deals with how the appearance of women has changed. The change in the appearance of women is considered in terms of altering their wardrobes and abandoning *dupatta* (long stole that is used for covering the chest and is an essential part of the wardrobe in Pakistan). The third section in this chapter explores openness in content in relation to the language used. The discussion in the viewers' section questions the inappropriateness of the language for the TV lounge (the place for family viewing). The issue is articulated in terms of how use of words for rape, feminine hygiene, and incest can, not only influence the image of the country, but also the respect for elders in the lounge. The last section in this chapter links the openness in gendered content to homosexuality and prostitution.

4.1: Recalling PTV

While it is interesting to note that democratic governments did not facilitate the process of liberalisation of media in Pakistan, it is also noteworthy that issues around morality have for long been regulated by the state, at least on television. In the last decade, religiosity is on the rise in society, hence freedom of any sort is scrutinised through the prism of religion. Since PTV's canvas has taken issue with gender-based topics in a subtle manner, the viewers seem to resent how

private broadcasters highlight these issues in the recent years. However, in doing so, the viewing sample take it as something that has been influenced by Indian programming. As realities on the ground or the popular discourse in society plays the tune in favour of religion, the viewers are observed to have disassociated themselves from the trends of *openness*. They suggest that it is a borrowed trend rather than it being a trend initiated by the Pakistani producers. I will first evaluate how viewers in older women in middle class recall PTV and then move on to assess the responses of younger women. An educated woman in the middle class of Sohni Chalet mentions how PTV adhered to decency in such a manner:

Tasneem: There is a huge difference between a PTV Production or a private production, just by looking at the screen you can make out if it is PTV's programme or some other private channel's, mainly because you can spot decency and grace through PTV's screen. I would also go as far as to say that those producers with PTV's experience who are now working for some private channels also have an edge over those who are new entrants to the industry, mainly because there is difference in their value system, just by looking at the screen I can easily make out the difference. (Sohni Chalet 3)

Tasneem is a middle-aged woman who actively participated in the discussions. She lives in a nuclear family system and is happy with her sons living independently. She discusses how a single glance at the screen enables a viewer to distinguish between the state channel and the private channels. The liberalisation in content is taken as vulgarisation and a deteriorating value system. But, there remains a realisation that the state has some limitations in programming. However, the resentment over censorship is usually directed towards news and infotainment rather in entertainment channels. This means

these viewers want to be fully aware of their socio-political context but have reservations on how it is expressed on television. The viewers in this sample are mostly middle-aged women who watched state television or had grown up watching PTV. Consider for example, how another set of middle-aged women in Sohni Chalet compare programming of state television to that of private channels:

Alia: There is too much censorship on PTV in terms of news, and no one watches it anymore. But, (Farah), there was some standard that PTV was following, and since we had one drama in a day, everyone used to watch it, at the moment, it is more about vulgarity as a trend that we have borrowed from the Indian channels. We have compromised a lot on our language as well and our drama serials are highlighting themes around extra marital affairs, and I have strict objection to it as well.

Sabeen: I don't think we should really object to it, for it is our reality, and it is what is happening in the society.

Tahira: If we compare private channels with PTV, I would say, yes, there is no censorship on news, as it was there in PTV, but apart from that, this content is devoid of ethics and affects home.

The discussion above offers some interesting exchanges on PTV. All four of these respondents live in the same residential colony and know each other quite well. Alia and Farah are not only next door neighbours but are also good friends. While recalling PTV, these viewers are not only concerned about the nature of the openness in the gendered content but how it affects the fabric of home. The prime concern in this regard is how programming in private channels

threatens the etiquettes of respect in Pakistani homes. However, Sabeen reminds the others that liberalisation of media is also about reflecting reality on screen. This invites attention to a crucial dimension of gender-based content that is based on realism. Two women in another group in the same residential colony also mention how they prefer state television over private networks to date, for they have concerns about the content's influence on ethics of their home.

Consider for example how housewives living in the middle-class locality of *Ancholi* compare the programming on private channels to that of PTV:

Zaheena: Even talk shows that try to raise some issues have their life limited to screen, have you seen any change in the society? They have been discussing on talk shows and we have been watching, but there is no difference in our attitudes and in our society. But yes, we do feel these channels have made the society more open, and we are letting go of our traditions and the mannerisms we were once proud of.

Ammi: The young generation can say anything in front of their elderly generation; it was not the case when we had PTV. Now, there is nothing off limits. PTV was careful about our values in home. (Ancholi 2)

This group had a unique composition, with Ammi (mother) as the member who was above 60. Ammi was very active throughout the discussion. Since I conducted these focus groups at her place, I could not ask her to leave the room. Apparently, she was very friendly towards all the participants who lived in the same neighbourhood. I could gauge that they respect her a lot and perhaps this could be one of the reasons for attending these discussions. It is also interesting to note how all participants referred to her as Ammi (mother) out of respect. This helped me in a way that I could easily conduct many focus groups

in this area, however, my concern was whether her constant presence would make young respondents more conscious about what could be said.

Throughout these discussions, PTV is recalled as the responsible broadcaster that would not have gone wrong with values and even gendered content. These viewers also read gendered content as a transition in the value system in Pakistani television culture. While these women may not acknowledge that television has direct effect on them and may also distance themselves from the realities depicted on screen, they however sound fearful of the impact such content may have on the value system. In Pakistani culture, respect of elders is of prime value, such that even women who may otherwise have a subordinate position in relation to a male guardian assume a position of power as mothers-in-law and grandmothers. Here, these housewives are mainly concerned about their children's attitude in front of their grandparents and how it is spoiled through viewing habits. In a candid discussion, they refer to how obedience is at stake, women stressed that young kids often pick abusive language or refer to issues of pregnancy from television and use it in the lounge (space utilised for family time). Such occurrences were easily avoidable in the days of PTV for censorship was so strong that viewers hardly had such issues.

The university going girls have not seen the glory days of PTV, but they have all watched the classic drama serials in the repeat transmissions that are aired regularly on PTV, note⁵⁴:

Hania: If you have also noticed, the protagonists were not sacrificial lambs in the days of PTV. When we started watching Star Plus back in the 1990s, the trends in our drama serials also changed, and we almost copied the Indian style of content.

⁵⁴ Please note, A and B denote the Respondent A and Respondent B. KU is the popular abbreviation for Karachi University. For instance, KU 1 denotes: Karachi University Group 1.

In the Indian soaps, it is quite evident that 'sacrifice' and 'patience' are the main qualities in female lead, and this is exactly what we tried copying for our drama serials. These qualities have somehow become essential for empowering women in Indian soaps and even in those drama serials that have great appeal among the viewers, with women bearing the burden of extra marital affairs of their husbands. The PTV had bold representation of women but who were also upright in characters.

Javeria: I think our limits should be clearly defined, as it was in the days of PTV. Everything is so *khula*/open. What is the point of knowing too much, if you look at the West, it is no wonder that it has lost their limits and even their homes, because their kids are too informed about their rights, they just leave their homes and do whatever they want to. (KU 1)

In a similar vein, young students of Karachi University in other groups have also shown tendency of resistance towards trends of *openness* in Pakistani television. The gendered content that is not compatible with the moral etiquettes of society, is often referred to as the derivative of some foreign influence; for instance, the reference to virtues such as patience and sacrifice are often shown in Indian soaps in relation to protagonist's strength in enduring injustices such as the husband's betrayal or extra marital affairs, and this trend has directly translated on to the Pakistani screen. The likelihood of the fact that Pakistani producers may have started a trend reflective of Pakistani society is not raised as another possibility by these viewers. However, the paranoia of losing moral values is far greater than anything else, and state television is recalled as the pioneer in producing decent content.

There is also an understanding among the viewers that producers in PTV knew what to give out to the public and where to stop. What is of interest to this project here, is to analyse these responses as neither favouring meek representations of women on screen nor giving too much information of rights on screen. What remains constant throughout this discussion on Pakistani state television is that there is too much censorship in news. As a result, women have switched to private channels, yet they hold a high opinion for programming on PTV and address the issue of lack of responsibility on the part of private broadcasters. Despite the issues raised here, I have only come across two women in my entire sample of respondents who are still keen on state television.

From the discussion above, it can be seen that viewers have quite fond memories of the state channel. However, their nostalgia for the state channel should not be taken as their desire to get back into those days or a desire to watch censored content on private channels. These viewers want to be aware and informed about the socio-political realities in the society. Throughout the focus groups, PTV is recalled as something that 'once was'. It can be called a kind of a temporal nostalgia – 'where there is a longing for the past, a time that once was' (to use Higson's term). In her study on websites that use nostalgia as a central concept, Higson (2014: 123) notes that 'temporal nostalgia is, of course, very much a product of and a response to the experience of modernity, the experience of a period marked by rapid change, mobility and displacement (Boym 2001; Fritzsche 2001 also quoted in Higson). It can also be true for the viewers in this study who are experiencing the transition in the gendered content on an extraordinary pace. This has also intersected with the access to the Internet and mobile technology. Therefore, content on PTV looks like a distant past and there is still no possibility of reversibility to that past, however, this comparison allows them to think about what is at stake in terms of their value system.

4.2: Losing Modesty/Abandoning *Dupatta*:

Moving on, this section will look at another feature that disturbs Pakistani viewers in relation to the *openness* in gendered content. Openness in this section is directly related to issues under *sharam* such as, 'aspects of concealment as a value, like nakedness of humans and beauty in concealment'. (Alvi, 2013) The pattern that emerges frequently in the focus groups discussions with the viewers is the issue of attire, and specifically the importance of *dupatta* in female wardrobe on screen. The respondents stress the importance of *dupatta* to the point that appearance of women develops as more crucial than the content itself.

In Muslim societies, female bodies are also sites for contestation, social construction, practices, symbols of decency, shame, humility, ethics, and repositories of honour and responsibility in Pakistan. In the context of Pakistani society, the female dress code comes much before the behaviour and practices observed under sexuality, and the female body, before anything else, is regulated through the wardrobe. The cultural attire for Pakistani women involves *shalwar* (baggy trouser) *qameez* (loose and long shirt) and *dupatta* (stole/chador).⁵⁵ This is not only supposed to be the national dress but it is also a common dress for the Indian subcontinent like *sari*. Over the years, Pakistani immigrants from India are letting go of their preference for *sari* because it is considered too Indian and conservative Muslims argue that it is a symbol of Hindu culture, and that it does not conform to the standards of modesty prescribed for the Muslim wardrobe. With the increase of Islamist elements in Pakistani society, the national/cultural wear that covers the female body entirely is now under scrutiny in the society

⁵⁵ Women usually drape their head and body with a *palla*,¹¹ also called *chunni*, or *dupata*, a cotton shawl, one meter broad and two meters long without which they feel naked despite their long shirt and baggy trousers (*shalwar-qamiz*): "a *palla* covers a woman's *sharm* (nakedness) Alvi, 2013:

and on screen. The objection arises from the fact that the dress code is not as modest and does not cover as properly as a Saudi *abaya* (black cloak worn by women). Therefore, in the last decade it has become a common sight on streets to spot a considerable number of women either covering their heads with the typical Arab style of scarf/*hijab* (not *dupatta*) or wearing *abaya* along with *hijab*. In this context, Pakistani women on screen have ceased to wear *dupatta* and it has become a common sight to watch them in Western dresses.

The fashion industry in Pakistan has also grown in the last ten years, and these trends reflect on screen. However, viewers express their reservations on the issue of wardrobe and like language, dress code also triggers a discussion on how female body is becoming unrestrained, and challenging the existing structure of shame in Pakistani context. In the viewers' sample from lower middle class, viewers were explicit about how anchor's wardrobe play a role in their selection of the morning shows. Hence, I could hardly find viewers following Shaista Wahidi's morning show, and the reason for not watching her show is that she does not represent them for she has abandoned *dupatta*. Consider for example, Middle Aged women in lower middle class based in New Karachi expressing their stance on *dupatta*:

Baji: We are living in Islamic Republic of Pakistan, so women who are appearing on television should conform to our traditional wear, which does include *dupatta* on shoulder if not on head.

Shehnaz: We still remember the *dupatta* policy on PTV, it was such a good trend, now *dupatta* has not only gone absent from the screen, one can also not find it with the readymade clothes in the market. It is all because of the media, the market also follows the trends through television. We only like Nida's show because she wears *dupatta*.

All women in this class cover themselves with outer cloaks (*abaya* and *hijab*), and for them to appear on television without *dupatta* is about being extrovert and losing modesty. During fieldwork, I could not have imagined myself going in these areas without covering my head properly with a *hijab*. These women also relate this to how fashion scene in Pakistan is changing with time and they appear judgmental about women who are careless about *dupatta* to the extent that they seem to have switched loyalties from Wahidi's show to Nida Pasha's show.⁵⁶ In order to understand how Nida Pasha conceptualises the importance of *dupatta*:

Nida Pasha: 36:04: I do respect my viewers, I wear *dupatta*, only for my viewers, I don't want any mother to say that our daughters have stopped wearing *dupatta* because of you.

Pasha is aware of her viewers' choices, and she reveals that her show has received countless messages on this issue stressing that she is the most followed and respected anchor because she wears *dupatta*. In addition, she mentions how viewers reacted to her appearance on one of her sitcoms (*Nadaniyan*) in which she appeared in jeans and a T-shirt. While commenting on this issue, she reminds me that viewers cannot be taken lightly for they can change loyalties to other shows, which indicates how important it is for some anchors to retain viewership among conservative viewers of the society. Interestingly, the viewing sample appears to be far more vocal on issues surrounding *dupatta* on screen than gender-based crimes; however, it also emerges as an age-related and class-based issue. Consider for example, how educated middle-aged women based in a residential

⁵⁶ Although this is a section on viewers but I think it is appropriate to include Nida Pasha's response here because viewers are mentioning her name here. Also, note that only Nida Pasha spoke on this issue during the fieldwork.

colony of Sohni Chalet take issue with *dupatta policy* during Zia's regime and even in post liberalisation era.

Husna: I never liked the restrictions governments used to have on state channel, especially *dupatta policy* during Zia's regime; it was an unnecessary thing to do. We were not given any economic relief in those days; it was a cosmetic change to divert our attention from the actual causes.... Qamar: I don't want to see *dupatta policy* on screen; it seems fake.

Yasmeen: We were not really bothered by the *dupatta policy*; it was annoying because it wasn't aimed towards changing our perception about *purdah* (dress code) (Sohni Chalet 5)

Husna is a lawyer by profession and lives with her brother's family. She is unmarried and appears to be very confident. Qamar is a retired head mistress and a widow who also lives impudently in Sohni Chalet. All three of these women, including Yasmeen do not cover their heads. For them, *dupatta policy*, as institutionalised by PTV for women on screen, is of lesser value; these women recall it as imposition and unnatural for women. Since women in this sample conform to the cultural attire but not to religious attire (outer garment), this issue has limited value for them. It is also worthwhile to note that as middle-aged women, their age entitles them under *Shariah* to let go of their outer garments (outer cloak and head covering). Moreover, these viewers do not express anxiety on how such representation can influence their young daughters. For them *hijab* does not define strength in faith nor do they take *dupatta policy* as a reminder to cover bodies as Muslim women. As it can be noticed, they criticise such a policy on women's wardrobe calling it cosmetic. Such a thought emerges from a popular quote in Muslim societies, which is usually coined by liberals and goes something like this, 'Islam is neither *in* women's *hijab* nor men's beard'. Further, these viewers argue that representation of women on screen should go beyond their

appearances and focus on how to portray an image at a global level. For these women, their identity as Pakistanis reflects through cultural attire, command over the language and mannerisms, which can restore the nation's image. There is also a hidden desire to do away with the Pakistani image of being extremists/fanatics/fundamentalists, which is why they did not seem so concerned about *dupatta* or *hijab* for that matter.

For housewives in the conservative Ahle Tashi (Shia sect of Islam) community of the middle class, women should wrap their bodies with *chador* if not *abaya*. It is because they try to conform to the standards prescribed by *Shariah* (Iranian version) for women's clothing. For example, here housewives based in Ancholi criticise how trend of not wearing *dupatta* can have impact on young girls.

Zaheena: Then we have this unfortunate trend of not wearing *dupatta* on screen, and the morning show hosts have completely abandoned *dupatta* from their wardrobe. The hosts of the morning shows are seen as role models among the young girls, and if they refuse to wear *dupatta*, it will leave a negative impact on our daughters. It is okay if they do not wear it on their heads, they should at least have it around their necks or on their shoulder, it is part of our culture. See, their personalities should reflect that they are Muslims.

Ammi: On the one hand, we have these women who appear on television with deep necklines; on the other hand, we have men appearing over-dressed in trousers with shirts and a coat on top of it. These women are wearing less and men are covering themselves properly, we disapprove of such fashion on television.

Hijab: In the last ten years, television has ruined this society. In boutiques, you can hardly find *dupatta* with shirts (*qameez*). It seems that our traditional wear

will soon be replaced by Western wear, with no sleeves and deep necklines, and where do you think are we picking this from? (Ancholi 2)

It is generally assumed among viewers that they pick up trends in fashion for women through television and anchors/female actors' wardrobe influence young girls. In addition, women in this sample were concerned about how it can affect their daughters' perception on the necessity of *dupatta*. It is also interesting to notice that women have different standards for those who appear on television and for themselves. For instance, even if they wear *chador/abaya*, they are comfortable with women on screen not conforming to the Islamic wardrobe; rather they want to see them in cultural attire. Obviously, *Shariah* allows women to wear certain form of clothing in the private sphere and prescribes an additional/outer garment for public spaces. Television being a public space does not conform to the prescribed code; however, these religiously inclined women are also not so keen to watch anchors/female actors following that.

During the discussions, viewers also quoted from Islamic scriptures on modesty in female attire. For the dress code for women in Islam, it is stated in the Holy Quran that: O Prophet, Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their outer garments about themselves (when they go out). That is better so that they may be recognised and not molested. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. [Al-Ahzaab, 33:59], such verses are further strengthened through statements of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in this manner: Abu Dawood narrates that `Aishah (RAA) said: "Asmaa' the daughter of Abu Bakr (RAA) came to see the Messenger of Allah (SAAWS) wearing a thin dress; so Allah's Messenger (SAAWS) turned away from her and said: O Asmaa', once a woman reaches the age of menstruation, no part of her body should be seen but this - and he pointed to his face and hands. In the last decade, these references have become

so popular that even moderate Muslims are aware of these narrations. In this case, television as well as the Internet have played a significant role in sending reminders to women and throughout the fieldwork, viewers quoted from *Quran* and *Hadith*. Despite that, cultural attire still seems to have more resonance and importance to them than the religious dress; however, there are different viewpoints on how women should dress in accordance with Islam. While some scholars assert that women should cover themselves from head to toe including their faces with an outer garment, a few digress to the point that women should wear clothes that may cover their bodies completely leaving hands and face (Ghamidi, 2011). With such views travelling through the society, clothes that reveal body can be offensive to some. Viewers in this sample raise the issue of how men are seen on screen to be overdressed but not that men are usually dressed in Western wear. It is also a fact that the wardrobe for men has never been under scrutiny in Islamic discourses on screen or even in society at large. Therefore, it is very common to see men wearing Western wear in Pakistan; it is one of those legacies of colonialism that continue to linger over Pakistani fashion industry for men. As women's body and clothing are regulated and controlled through religion, culture and also through gaze, men's wardrobe goes unobserved, but such readings tend to vary with class and locality.

Surprisingly, the younger generation attending the state university do not seem comfortable with such trends on screen. There is a possibility that students that attend the state university come from conservative backgrounds while students from affluent middle class and above usually either attend private universities or go abroad for their education. Yet one can also not underestimate the role of Islamisation of the society. Here, the female students of the English Department reflect upon such trends in this way:

Hina: Now, women are seen smoking in public, they wear jeans and above all, girls have abandoned wearing *dupatta*, and it is no longer something that would turn any heads. Such has become a common sight in Pakistan, and it can be closely linked to our representation of women on television.

Zunaira: For the last ten years, we have seen such liberal representation of women in attire that we have almost altered our traditional wardrobe. (KU3)

These viewers seem to be uncomfortable with how women dress on screen and there is a sense of loss in their expression. What is interesting to note here is that these young viewers wear Arab style *hijab*/scarf, if not cloak. But they do not mention how Arab imperialism is also altering national wardrobe at the same pace as Western wear has altered on screen. In another focus group, students noted this trend in such a manner:

Saima: And just look at Shaista Wahidi, her wardrobe does not have *dupatta* in it, even our news reporters are not wearing *dupatta*, and if they do wear something in the name of *dupatta*, it is usually a narrow scarf. And those who shouldn't be wearing a *dupatta*, that is the men of our society, are now wearing scarves around necks. I am not in favour of veil or covering heads, what I mean is that we should stick to our traditional dress that covers what *should* be covered in women as per the Holy Book; the *dupatta* is for women to cover their chests....

Ruqayya: Yes, I think television has a role to play in fashion, we get to know what is in and what is out of fashion through television. Sometimes, reporters have to cover stories in the backward areas, where conservative communities live, and even at such places these female reporters are wearing jeans and shirts. (KU 8)

In a very assertive tone, Saima and Ruqaiyya, students of Urdu Department

with Islamic learning as their minor subject, argue that they disapprove of anchors who have abandoned *dupatta*. For these girls, importance of *dupatta* is far greater than stole or *hijab*, and they refer to another interpretation within Islam that stresses on covering the bosom. Moderate Muslims who do not cover their heads do follow the saying: Allah says: "And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts from sin and not show of their adornment except only that which is apparent, and draw their head covers over their necks and bosoms[An-Nur, 24:31]. Young respondents here refer to this quote, however, their understanding does not make use of head covering to cover their chests rather they stick to the interpretation (which is rarely used by scholars except for Ghamidi 2011, Barlas, 2006), that covering chests is mandatory while women can leave their head open in the absence of *fitna* (temptation). Under this interpretation, these young viewers can preserve cultural attire and also stick to the standards of modesty. Those who abandon *dupatta* are considered to be modern and to a degree, Western. Ammara Maqsood notes in her recent study on emerging patterns of religious consumption in Pakistan that 'modern-ness in Pakistan is also defined by dressing in Western styles of clothing, as well as with their familiarity with Western culture'. (Maqsood, 2013: 92)

The section above demonstrates how wearing of *dupatta* is directly linked to the questions of identity and morality. It is also evident how viewers reflect on this issue as a matter of collective concern rather than a personal choice. The discussion above shows that *dupatta* is not merely a piece of cloth; rather it signifies cultural values, modesty, shame and identity for women as Pakistanis and also as Muslims. The young viewers in the University, and the housewives based in Ancholi link this issue to loss of cultural values. These women address the issue of female wardrobe as a social problem, something that is directly related to women's collective identity. It will not be wrong to assume that

'absence of *dupatta*' from screen allows women to think about men's wardrobe too, it also positions them into the category of Muslim women. However, these readings vary with class and age. For the middle-aged women in the affluent middle-class of Sohni Chalet, this matter has little value in terms of collective identity. Their anxieties for representation of women on screen highlights their concern for national image of Pakistan. They engage with this issue as citizens of Pakistan who are more concerned about the country's image. In this sense, *openness* in gender-based issues offers occasions for behaving as citizens who reflect upon their collective identities as Pakistanis and as modest women.

4.3: *Openness* in the gender-based content: Consequences for the home and lounge:

Examining television content includes visuals as well as the language used. In case of this study, the viewers and the producers take language as the signifier of mannerism, etiquettes, honour, and shame and as a practice that challenges power within home. In this discussion, the content in question also focusses on the suitability of the themes (topics and their execution) for the fabric of home in general and lounge in particular, and how it disturbs the established structure and the fabric of home. Home and lounge emerge as the key components in this discussion on openness in gendered content. This section analyses the viewers' concern on how openness in content impacts upon relationships within home through language used in content and themes picked. This discussion takes two lines of inquiry, first; that deals with the impact of the content on the relationships within home, and second; that deals with the appropriateness of the language for home. The second aspect is mainly taken up in relation to family viewing in lounge. At this point, I may also remind readers that home is (as discussed in Chapter 2), where relationships are structured hierarchically between the husband and wife and also between in-laws and the daughters-in-law.

For instance, housewives based in the middle class locality of *Ancholi* express their concern on the issues of the shame and embarrassment that they feel in watching with family. On the question about content's role in making viewers aware of the outside reality, a few respondents argue differently on this matter.

Zaeema: We can recall a time when the word, 'rape' was completely unheard of in our homes or even on television. Now, even a child would know what it is about. Such content has made us aware of certain crimes, such *openness* in words and images on screen can give some sort of imagination to the potential perpetrators.

Hira: When our children ask us what a love story is, we do feel embarrassed. This has never been our culture. (Ancholi 3)

For these housewives, knowing about incidents does not guarantee protection to women and therefore they considered such information to be of lesser value than the repercussion of discussing such issues within the family, especially in front of children. Zaeema is an extremely religious woman who avoids watching entertainment channels because she thinks that there is hardly any content for family viewing. The issue raised here is how repeating offensive words on screen can desensitise the viewers, and specifically young children who are now getting familiar with words such as rape. Jay notes that 'the repetition of a word. . . blunts the original offence caused by inhibition or taboo. This desensitisation effect is not particular to dirty words but occurs when any word is used repeatedly' (Jay, 1992, p. 14 quoted in Kaye and Sapolsky, 2001).

In many groups conducted in *Ancholi*, viewers mention that crime shows featuring gender-related abuse give unnecessary details to the viewers. By this, respondents mean that giving details of 'how a crime is carried' can be harmful

for the society, for it can give ideas to potential perpetrators on how to orchestrate crimes and get away with it. It can also be argued that crime shows focus on how crime is conducted which leaves viewers with a sense of helplessness because in Pakistani context no crime show ever features the follow up on trials. Due to the deficiencies in the judicial system, perpetrators, though brought before the court, often find their way out of prison. Therefore, watching such shows is not only about knowing about gender-based crimes but also witnessing the failures of judicial systems and the superiority of a patriarchal culture.

In addition to this, another concern that recurs across the focus groups is about 'embarrassment and shame'. Since women watch television with their kids around in the same room, they find it difficult to keep children from picking up issues of intimate nature. In this regard, a woman aged 60, expresses her concern in this manner:

Ammi: My grandson is so young and one day while watching one of the characters in *Kaash*, he told me 'granny, she is going to have a baby, she is pregnant'. This is not our culture, the producers should not be showing the bump of the pregnant characters, and should be reserved in their usage of words for references to pregnancy. We have picked up such trends of openness from Indian soaps. Though part of Islam, multiple marriages was not a topic for the drama serials in our society, now every other drama highlights this issue.

Zaheena: These drama serials are actually ruining the minds of our kids, and they do not leave any positive impact on our minds too. If drama serials are for awareness, what kind of awareness are these images giving to us? If the target audiences are female viewers, who are mostly housewives, then we already know about pregnancy, labour pains and what to use in periods. So, either it is

for men watching at home or the kids who have made our lives miserable with their questions about feminine issues.

(Ancholi 1)

Discussing feminine hygiene/health or issues about intimate sphere is considered to be offensive in Pakistan, especially in religiously-inclined households. The respondents who are based in *Ancholi* are mostly coming from conservative backgrounds; it is a locality where devout *Ahle Tashi* community (Shia) is dominant and the code of life is defined in the idiom of religion while religion strictly prohibits discussing issues of intimate nature with anyone except for one's spouses. Islam also encourages intense silence on issues of shame.⁵⁷ The idea among the viewers is that issues concerning pregnancy and sex (whether in drama serials or crime shows) can trigger perversion in children's minds. For example, it is common in Pakistan that women do not buy sanitary pads on their own and while buying, such products are additionally wrapped in a paper to hide them from others' sight. This is why women find it extremely offensive to watch such advertisements or even any form of content (talk shows on female health) that refer explicitly to female reproductive health. Interestingly, all that is found offensive is directly or indirectly linked to the influence of Indian channels on Pakistani content, especially, where content gets *open*. The case in point here is that of *Kaash May Teri Baiti Na Hoti*, an extended serial based on the theme of selling daughters as brides. The plot was realistic and the narrative was engaging, however, many viewers raised a concern regarding open references to issues of pregnancy and lactation in dialogues. This is not something unique to Pakistani context, Seiter and Riggs (1999: 100) find similar patterns of conservatism among the Christian fundamentalists. While researching on the role fundamentalist teachers in working-class churches and fundamentalist day cares, Seiter and

⁵⁷ These are purely matters of *Haya* which can translated into modesty and shame.

Riggs (1999) identify how participants in their research cherish the memories of their past as the time of innocence. The participants raise issue with not just the content on television (a scene in a gay bar) but also toys such as Barbie. Throughout this study, the anxiety about impact of media use on children remains constant. The findings are not much different in the case of Pakistan. Instead of calling it a cultural lag, I would attribute this level of conservatism to the rising religiosity in Pakistan. Religion clearly has a major role in appropriating gender-based content. Viewers tend to express their unease towards the content that challenges or negotiates their existing structure values and their sense of privacy and privateness.

An interesting dimension that emerged in this discussion also focused on how inappropriate use of language relates to the spatial dynamics of the house. By that, viewers tend to focus on how language should be adapted according to varying spaces (from bedroom to lounge to any public space); in this case they picked up that what is appropriate in the bedroom between spouses is not appropriate for lounge where members of extended family and children are also present.

Zainab: I don't think we can watch drama serials such as *Dil Toh Bhatkay Ga* or *Kaash May Teri Beti Na Hoti* with your family, the language used is so not suitable for lounge. You don't have to say it loud, for things that are of intimate nature, I am sure all our viewers are quite smart to pick that up. With usage of open language for everything, we are actually picking up such expression. (Ancholi 5)

Language as the signifier for shame and respect becomes crucial here; in case of *Dil Toh Bhatkay Ga*, the protagonist is shown to have an illicit relationship with one of her male servants purely for the reason that her husband declines her

sexual rights in marriage. This topic highlighting the ordeal of women who are denied their rights in marriage does not strike as an important theme to these viewers than the choice of words in dialogues and its suitability of lounge. Similarly, the issue raised in *Kaash May Teri Beti Na Hoti* has immense social value but does not engage viewers with its theme; rather viewers expressed concerns on the use of language and how television is threatening culture with inappropriate use of dialogues for lounge, a space that is more public than the bedroom. Several viewers also raise issue on how they have discontinued watching drama serials/talk shows which cannot be watched in lounge with family. Notice how a middleclass housewife based in the residential colony of Sohni Chalet comments on language again:

Mehwish: But we do have reservations on drama serials such as *Yeh Zindagi Hai*⁵⁸. What are they exactly aiming at with *Zindagi* like serials? The language used in this drama serial is not suitable for lounge, this is not our culture and what impression would it leave on the expat community and those living abroad (perhaps the West). Pakistanis do not fight all the time at home. This drama is all about a family in a certain class that is uneducated and loud, and it does not truly represent that class. (Sohni Chalet 3)

What is striking here is to see how women, whether middle-aged or young housewives appropriate content differently through locality. For instance, women in Sohni Chalet seem to be consistent in their concern for the image of Pakistan. By referring to *Yeh Zindagi* as a drama serial representing a certain class, these viewers distance themselves from the class-specific issues raised in it.⁵⁹ At this point, class also intervenes with their reading of the text, but they appear

⁵⁸ A drama serial about the socio-economic problems faced by lower and lower-middle class.

⁵⁹ See for example, Hermes and Muller (2012: 199) for similar discussion on critical and distanced observer.

portray themselves as knowledgeable viewers with inherent sense of responsibility towards country's image. It is also noteworthy how the dichotomy of public/private runs not through television versus home but also lounge versus bedroom. To put it in other words, the spatial significance of the lounge (family room) is such that it is more public than the bedroom within home. While noting this spatial dynamics in South Asian context, Mahajan (2009: 136) mentions that the 'understanding of private operates at different levels, on the one hand it refers to home as private and whatever is outside it as public, but on the other hand, within home, there are spheres of privacy and privateness that operate on the level of spaces such as bedroom versus lounge, bedroom is considered where self prevails and other members of family must seek permission before entering. In this way, popular culture offers occasions to reflect upon citizens' understandings of moral boundaries of public and the private and its relevance to the spatial constitution of home.

Since 55 per cent women in this sample watch television in the lounge, with others in the family, they express concern not only about the impact of choice of words on home but also on Pakistan's image in the diaspora. These viewers do not want to send image of Pakistan that is loud; rather they want to exhibit their adherence to the culture of decency and conservatism in language. In case of *Yeh Zindagi Hai*, they attribute 'loudness' to the lack of refinement in a certain class. This can be related to Bourdieu's argument that 'art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously or unconsciously and deliberately or not to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences'. (1984: XXX) These viewers are clearly distancing themselves from characters represented in *Yeh Zindagi*. For them, these characters are not representative of their class, however, they do represent a class in the society. Yet, there is a clear acknowledgement in the 'response' above that it is not their class, but another class that *exists* in the society. This also demonstrates differences and diversity within the viewing

public for gendered content. In this context, the moment content signifies class; the issue loses its importance. The issue of language awakens these viewers to reflect in terms of citizens who are concerned about the image of the country but not in terms of their gender.

What is far more interesting for this study is a pattern that emerged among the respondents of lower middle class who were not only keen on these drama serials but also stress that narratives such as *Kaash*, *Yeh Zindagi Hai* and also crime shows represent their class, their problems, whilst they had issues with narratives which represent the affluent class. This raises a question for the constitution of the gendered public. Do viewers in all classes constitute the public for the gendered content or not? It is difficult to arrive at a single answer to this question. At this point, I would argue that all of these viewers of gender-based content do form a 'loose' public. Their engagement patterns fluctuate with genres, diction and issues raised. In this regard, a citizenship aspect of gender-based content is both enabling and disabling. For example, when the variable of class intervenes, viewers distance themselves from certain realities thinking in terms of a nation yet disengaging from their social self. However, these middle-aged women in the affluent middle-class of Sohni Chalet do not seem to be bothered with such *openness* in content, but young viewers are concerned about taboos being raised on screen. I will now look at how students take issue with the appropriateness of this content:

Samra: Media have a role to play in society, but there is no justification for misuse of its power. Crime shows such as *Shabbir Toh Dekhay Ga* and *Meri Kahani Meri Zabani* are so inappropriate for family viewing. Some cases are so sensitive in nature that they should never have been brought up on a public medium like television. For instance, cases involving incest can tarnish the relationships at home forever; a girl can misjudge her own father's intention. Above everything,

these programmes are bringing the relationships at stake. So, here are the issues involved in following these shows, which apparently, have a lesser purpose for the betterment of society and more for increasing our stress levels. (KU 5)

What is apparent here, is that Samra is acknowledging that the human condition is similar to what is being portrayed on crime shows but are still reluctant to know about it for it can affect relationships at home. It raises questions about how much one wants to know about facts of life outside their own homes, and it is obviously not possible to know about all that is happening in the society but producers can determine what should be known or kept from the society. It depends upon the producers' commercial agenda, but also their responsibility to reflect the society for viewers. However, the viewing sample takes issue with certain representations that can tarnish relationships of honour and respect. Even viewers who have been distancing themselves from such crime stories get offended in knowing that someone else in the society is subjected to certain forms of abuse. They seem to be distancing themselves from such stories of crimes. Yet taking offence from such incidents, in other words points out towards a hidden fear of or a sense of vulnerability to such crimes. What is also apparent in this reading is that young viewers who are engaging in public life online and in the universities do not find such cases worthy of exposure. While calling them stress-inducing, they refuse to appreciate the necessity of being vocal on how vulnerable women are inside the home.

It also brings to the surface the obsession of viewers for protecting their own homes and especially their own relationships. When viewers raise the issue of home and its sacredness for them, they are in other words pointing towards the relationships that define them. This is specifically true for women where their whole existence is at stake in relation to their male guardian. The issue these viewers are facing is about questioning their own identity, which is glorified in

relation to their fathers and brothers at home. For example, it is a common practice in Pakistani households to add a prefix to the names of women that highlights their name in relation to their fathers (*Binte/* daughter of, or their sons (*Umme* X mother of) or simply Mrs X. In this sense, the identity of women cannot be seen in isolation or without their affiliation to their male relatives. It has become a regular feature in the crime shows to show that the crimes against women are carried out by their male guardians. In this regard, in another group of University students note:

Sobia: I think we should only restrict topics on talk shows for general issues, about society and environment or health and not home.

Another two respondents, Sumera and Rabeeya: We don't think it is advisable to do so, for home is the pivot of all activities in Pakistan, and unfortunately people are still not at this level to engage with the issues on environment and health. For Pakistani people, what happens within the four walls of their homes and that of others is more important than these social issues. We are much more eager to participate and engage with television when it is about someone's private life but just to watch others. (KU 4)

It is very interesting to note that on the one hand, Sobia, Sumera and Rabeeya of Mathematics Department come across as enlightened enough to care about issues on health and environment but on the other hand, crimes that emerge from home are taken as non-issues. All three were in *abaya* while Sobia also covered her face. For these girls engaging with issues about homes refer to two possibilities; one that cashes in on their curiosity and they seek pleasure through watching others' miseries, and the other suggests issues around home are not considered as serious as issues on health or environment. The concern they raise is linked to the element of curiosity and pleasure that viewers seek from watching other people's

issues, but not in terms of breaking the silence on home-based issues (domestic violence/incest in particular). Not many in my viewing sample admit to seeking pleasure from gender-based content. Watching for the sake of pleasure and escape yet again falls into the category of *lughwiyat* (useless activities) and is therefore something very personal (related to *sharam*). It is also evident that home and relationships for the younger generation remain above serious public scrutiny.

The section above evaluated the aspects of openness in relation to the language used. By and large, all viewers express the anxiety to protect the cultural values that have become vulnerable in the post-lib period. However, a closer look at the reading reveal that the affluent middle-class is more concerned about the impact of openness on others, and the image of the country, whereas, the viewers in the other economic groups seem to be more concerned about the impact of language on the relationships at home. It is not the interactive format of the talk shows that is negotiating the binary between the public and the private (home), rather it is the content (language used) that contests the boundaries of etiquettes at home.

4.4: Glorifying/highlighting gender-based taboos: is it about vulgarizing content?

In this discussion on openness in themes, such as prostitution, homosexuality, incest and other similar issues, viewers expressed their concerns about the ways in which such themes are glorified rather than taken up as serious issues out of concern. Anything that is out of the ordinary is not only looked at with suspicion but viewers also express that they want it to be removed from the screen. Consider for example, how women in the sample of young middle class

housewives in Ancholi clarified their position on highlighting prostitution on screen:

Zaheena: A: Another trend that has taken to the drama serials is that of writing about the lives of prostitutes. We do have prostitution in our society and this element should be highlighted but on a limited scale, a drama serial or two are enough for such topics, but nowadays there are so many serials about or around such elements of the society. We want to see reality based drama and by that we mean reality of the majority of people.

Ammi: Can you imagine that we also have a drama serial, *Behkawa* that has raised questions on a sibling relationship; it is in bad taste. But (Haya), I think writers take story from the society, and if it has been raised then this is the story of someone in our society. (Ancholi 1)

Interestingly, in the extract above, viewers repeatedly raise the gap between actual reality and the distorted version of their reality on screen, implying that prostitution may be someone's reality but does not represent their own concern. Throughout this discussion, the contention is to argue that media should be a mirror image of the majority, rather than a representative of all. In this way, viewers disassociate themselves from certain groups of the society that either choose to live differently or have no choice but to live differently as compared to how the majority is living. In the context of Pakistan, society in general is prone towards religiosity or any other conservative style of living; prostitution as a profession has no space in an Islamic society, whether women are forced into the profession or choose it themselves, the punishment for adultery is so grave (stoning) that people are even hesitant to talk about it. Drama serials (*Umrao Jan*

Ada, Zip Bus Chup Raho, Akhri Barish) hardly glorify the profession; rather they focus on the miserable lives of prostitutes, but the silence on such a subject is so profound that viewers get uncomfortable even watching it.

Another example raised in the discussion is that of *Behkawa*, that raises yet another sensitive issue that is not entirely based on incest; however, it depicts a relationship of warmth and love between a woman and her adopted brother (adopted by her biological parents). The brother in this serial develops feelings for this woman who should otherwise be treated as a sister. This narrative is too complicated for, not only the viewers in this group (middle class) but is also not easily palatable for women in other groups.

These viewers read all gendered content through the lens of religion. For them, issues on which religion is silent or takes an issue with Islam should not appear on television (prostitution, homosexuality, incest), and issues that are condemned under the religion should also be condemned on television. The case of *Behkawa* in many ways warns about adopting kids and of the possibility of such relationships arising between siblings; this is exactly how it is condemned in religion, but these women preferred complete silence on this issue on television even if the content is condemning the sibling relationship. However, viewers in middle-aged women in the affluent middle class of Sohni Chalet picked the intention of the producers/writers of *Akhri Barish* and argued in favour on such content:

Ghazala: *Akhri Barish* (Last Rain) is such a positive drama you that there are some girls who want to escape from the clutches of prostitutes, but they struggle a lot for assimilation into the society. I don't think there is any harm in giving exposure to prostitutes on screen, it is not about glorifying them, and if your own roots are

well entrenched, and no such viewing can have a bad impact on you or your generation. (Sohni Chalet 1)

This is the only response I receive in favour of such representation; even women in this group differ in opinion and seem to be reluctant to watch stories based on the lives of a prostitute. Most of these women are educated and spoke as knowledgeable people. They sounded familiar with the glorious days of prostitution in subcontinent, and two of them even argue that during Moghul Period, this institution flourished, for there was strict segregation of spaces (*zanana*/female space and *mardana*/male space) within family homes. As a result, men took the liberty in availing such services. These women also stress that over a period of time, this institution has become redundant and should now be condemned. What is evident in this reading is their selective preference for tradition and the longing for the past; a particular past of the Muslims that glorifies the mannerism and etiquettes of the courtesans while at the same time distancing themselves from the state/condition of prostitutes in present times.

Respondents who support such content on television are clear on the fact that television cannot alter the dynamics of homes; therefore, anything that appears on television other than lifestyle is of little value in relation to the home. Women also assert that their engagement with television is for viewing and deriving pleasure. Therefore, *Akhri Barish* offers an interesting watch for them; however, it is also apparent these women did not take this particular serial as fictitious, rather their sympathy with the characters grew out of their sympathies for the dark realities of the prostitutes' lives that reflect a sense shared grief as women. Meanwhile middle-aged women in lower middle class (New Karachi) clearly condemned such content, whether fictitious or on talk shows:

Rukhsana: The content that raises concerns over how women in Pakistani society are falling prey to prostitution is based on the factual realities. Watching such realities on television and around us as well, not that my girls would opt for such ways but they have realised that it is not easy to have a good lifestyle unless you are ready to compromise on your moral values.

Almas: The other day, I watched a girl of around fifteen years of age talking to an anchor about her work, I couldn't believe my ears when she said that she charges 2000 to 3000 rupees for two hours, depending upon the conditions. Obviously, all viewers, men and women alike, can easily gather information about her profession and how easy it has become to fetch one of these girls, and had you been willing to compromise on your morality, far easier it is to raise quick money. (New Karachi 5)

There are some crucial aspects raised in the snippet above from the discussion among women who belong to the lower middle class. These women have teenage daughters working in factories and they are concerned about any social evils that may have influence upon young girls who step out of their homes to make both ends meet. Almas, in particular was worried about her three daughters who work in a packaging department. For them, such issues on television resonate with the realities on ground and they acknowledge that prostitution is 'there' in the society.

Unlike women in the educated middle class, women in the lower middle class look at this issue in a somewhat different manner. First, they identify it as a reality and then go on to share their fears about being influenced by such practices. For them, giving details and whereabouts of avenues for such a

profession can invite unwanted dangers to their homes. They are mainly concerned about the low salaries of their daughters in factories and even in other professions (such as beauticians in small salons) and the fact that television openly discusses how prostitutes in Pakistan can bring easy money (£15-20 for a few hours) is a matter of concern to them as parents. For them such information can tempt young female viewers towards thinking about such professions. Rehana and Almas also mention how watching such issues has made them suspicious of families living in their neighbourhood who are living without male members/guardians. In Pakistani context, women hardly live on their own; even as divorcees or widows they prefer to live with their male relatives (*mehram*: male custodians), and living alone can cast doubts on their characters. Therefore, it is evident how women who are economically weak and conservative appropriate such text differently. There is a sense of anxiety in their responses and their performance/practices as cultural citizens depend upon the problems they face in their everyday life.

Variations in responses on this issue continue in the sample from University students; the girls who are already active in public life on campus respond to such content in this manner:

Nadira: We can see different roles of women on television; female characters are even glorified as prostitutes, and at the same time, they are even shown to us as victims of this profession. It is giving women awareness about such elements of society but it is also letting them opt for such professions for it has become our reality.

Other respondent in another group:

Safina: Prostitution is another matter that shouldn't be brought up on

television to the extent that we have almost assimilated these elements into our society. There was a time when we couldn't even utter the word 'prostitute' in front of anybody, but now television has desensitised us towards this issue, and we are now even discussing it among ourselves. Now, drinking is also a common visual on screen, we couldn't have imagined ourselves watching such a thing on Pakistani television ten years ago, and this is certainly not something we want to watch. (KU 6)

Girls in this group studied at the Department of English. It is quite apparent that Nadira and Safina are not satisfied with the kind of content Pakistani television produces in relation to gender. While they admit that the producers' intention is not to glorify such professions, they still express concerns over how women may fall for such professions. With the exception of a few, all groups in University of Karachi, find it difficult to even speak on the topics considered taboos. They clearly distance themselves from these issues, arguing that such content can have a negative influence on viewers who have limited exposure. There is a clear perception of an audience in their mind (teenage girls of lower income groups or from rural areas) who may get easily influenced without absorbing the explicit intention of the producers and at the same time, there is an embedded understanding that such content has no direct influence on their own lives.

Similarly, the inherent fear that emerges here is that these students do not want such elements to assimilate into the society. There is a desire/intention to abstract such elements from society and reduce them into ghettoised groups; at the same time, they do not want such groups to stand out and be prominent on screen. It is difficult not to have the presence of such groups on television, because genres such as those of crime shows often draw stories from such communities. It is in this presence of the issue of prostitution on television that these viewers acknowledge it as a social concern. Another factor raised in this

discussion is about transsexuals:

Raida: There was a campaign on television for the rights of transsexuals. After it, they were given the status of equal citizens in society. But we are uncomfortable with it, we are giving them confidence to do whatever they want to do, and you are also familiar with the kind of work they get involved in, if they want to live among us they should live like us, rather than being beggars or prostitutes. Do you think they have assimilated?

Asking a rhetorical question on what happens to such elements after they are recognised through Law, the discussion reveals the myth of assimilation of transsexuals into the Pakistani society. In the year 2011, transsexuals were given recognition as a separate gender category but the amendment in Law is still not above the cultural bias towards this group.⁶⁰ Even for these young women who are active in the public life of Pakistan, it is difficult to transcend through already established sexual stereotypes in the society. While asking for such communities to 'live like us', these viewers demonstrate that for them there is no possibility of any other sexual orientation than that of a man and a woman (heterosexuals). It also raises concerns about the fact that if such groups are taken as having distinctive qualities/traits and at the same time looked at with contempt and suspicion, assimilation into the society can come as a difficult project. While isolating a particular group, these viewers are said to be working for the larger good of the society. Practising cultural citizenship, in this sense works against its inherent value of social inclusion.

Moreover, these students also argue that there is a limit to the expression

⁶⁰ Pakistan transgender pin new hopes on human rights (2011) *BBC News*, April 27 [Online], Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13186958>, (Accessed July 5, 2013).

on a public medium. This draws attention to how these girls perceive the research work for this study, whether they consider it to be private discussion or a public discussion. In either of the cases, this may have impacted their responses. It is difficult to identify how these women perceive the nature of this discussion, but in most cases, they seem to be comfortable talking about these issues. A few religiously-inclined students have also participated with an intention to give voice to their personal concerns on a public level, especially to send their views back to the West.

Interestingly, even when representations are fictitious in popular culture, and it is known to the public that those performing are male artists cross-dressing as women, such representations remain a controversy and offensive to the viewers. The case in point is that of Ali Saleem who cross-dresses as a woman. He is known for his character of Begum Nawazish Ali, the widow of a retired army officer. Ali Saleem used to host a late night talk show in which he used to invite politicians, celebrities as well as the clergy⁶¹. The character is popular for her flirtatious ways and also for an appearance that is deceiving and questionable in the Islamic society. There has been an on-going discussion on his sexuality in the press. In Pakistan, cross-dressing males are often taken as the *Hijras* (transsexuals). Tahir H. Naqvi (2011) notes in his study on Media and the Geo-Politics of Moderation in Pakistan, '*Hijras* often engage in the public performance of an imagined female sexuality that can be enjoyed by men without the accusation of homosexuality. For his part, Saleem shuns the title of *hijra* or female impersonator: the Begum is an 'expression' of Saleem, who has recently acknowledged his bi-sexuality' (Naqvi, 2011: 119). In his interview to Gosh on Al Jazeera Network, Saleem represents his persona as Begum is a liberating experience for himself and also an inspirational character for the Pakistani

⁶¹ No longer on air.

women who are otherwise oppressed under the patriarchal regimes. He suggests that it is empowering them psychologically (Interview to Gosh, 2010)⁶². Naqvi, who has recently worked on the transition in the media culture also notes: 'what ensues during the Begum's interviews with her male guests, I contend, is a structure of feeling, in which the existing and emergent contours of Pakistani popular culture enter into a kind of dialogue.' (Naqvi, 2011: 119-120). Naqvi links this character to 'an expression of moderate Muslim and feminist agency' (120). With the popularity of this character, popular culture essentially became a site for performance of sexuality and also pushing boundaries for women to 'express their desire in the domestic and public arena' (120).

When I discuss the character of Begum Nawazish with the viewers, I find that in my entire sample, I do not come across a single respondent who could appreciate the portrayal of Begum Nawazish Ali. It turns out that women in the lower middle class, whether young or aged do not follow this show; however, those in the middle class sample watched his show found it very offensive. A few young housewives who know this character for his popularity argue he is not even worthy of discussion.

For middle-aged women in Sohni Chalet, the representation was not that offensive. Despite the confusion over his sexuality, the common perception is that he is a man acting as a female character and therefore there is an understanding among these viewers that his flirtatious ways on screen are much more palatable because of his male gender. Women, even as actors/performers have to be careful about not crossing the boundaries laid down by the cultural

⁶² Gosh, Shuili (2012) interviews Ali Saleem on *Every woman*, *Al Jazeera News* uploaded by, MrLifestyletime (2012), Everywoman Growing up Muslim and Begum Nawazish Ali, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hABWGSuK8A> (Accessed: August 24, 2014).

code of conduct for women; even if it is fictitious, women may find it difficult to perform something out of normal (by Pakistani standards).

Husna: Initially, we really liked the portrayal of *Begum Nawazish Ali*, but it shouldn't have dragged on for years. But, I think there is an issue with his sexual orientation, can't say what it is. Being a man in actual life, he could get away with whatever he wanted to say on screen, had there been a woman, the society wouldn't have taken the same flirtatious attitude.

Qamar: Looking at him as *Begum*, I struggle with the question of whether his character is about degrading a woman or a man really. (Sohni Chalet 5)

Another observation that emerges from this discussion is that these viewers struggle with understanding his sexuality. He is taken as a sexual deviant who is trying to fit into either the box of the feminine or the masculine and in so doing he fails for them. There is no chance of treating him as someone with a sexual inclination of his own. The question raised by this respondent here draws attention to the society's biases towards women. Ali Saleem can get away with the character of *Begum* because he is taken as a man. Had he been a woman, the society would have reacted differently to this portrayal. This draws attention towards the biases and stereotypes that encage women in Pakistan. Viewers do not seem to be appropriating Saleem's character as liberating for women; rather they find it unusual, exotic and also regressive for female or male identity. It may seem that viewers have rejected the content or were more critical of it, but through the character of *Begum*, popular culture invites these viewers to think about other possibilities in sexual orientation. Such representation open up the

traditional discourses on citizenship for a discourse on identities, otherness and tolerance (See for example, Stevenson, 2001 and Turner, 1993). Therefore, sounding dismissive of a content does not mean that it does not have any impact or the viewers have not engaged with it critically.

On probing whether it is his flirtatious attitude that is not acceptable for women or his cross-dressing, the discussion on Begum Nawazish Ali triggers comments on his sexuality. Consider for example how these women in middle class housewives' sample from Ancholi discuss his portrayal:

Zaeema: Begum Nawazish Ali, we neither want to see a depiction such as that of Begum on television nor that of *Wudud* (a feminine character in *Qudussi Sahab ki Bewah*). Any such homosexual representation makes us uncomfortable and we think it can also have bad influence on our own male children, they may want to behave in a feminine way. There are children who have similar traits, they can use such representation on screen as references for their real life. (Ancholi 1)

In this sample of middle class housewives, women argue that such portrayals can have a bad influence on their kids. Interestingly, these viewers do not rule out the possibility of having similar traits in the male kids, but at the same time express their fear of confronting it as a possibility in their own life. They find that such characters are potent enough to have an impact on viewers who share similar attributes; however, this has not emerged as a concern among women who may find parallels to the protagonists' onscreen attributes. The concern is mainly in relation to kids who may have tendencies to act differently than what is considered normal in the Pakistani society. There are also concerns about Ali Saleem's (who portrays as Begum Nawazish Ali) sexuality. Rather than thinking

about how well he performs as Begum or how fine he is as an artist, the discussion is mainly about his sexuality in real life. Moreover, any such representation that involves the question of sexual ambivalence makes the viewers critical. Viewers take the position of the responsible citizens and comment on 'what media should and should not show on screen' and strengthen their arguments with references from the tradition of *Hadith*.

This section looked at the 'taboos' in the popular culture. Within these taboos, physical proximity between the couples, incest, homosexuality, prostitution and sexual ambivalence (case of Begum) were discussed. The readings of these issues varied according to the viewers' subjective positions and religious inclinations. However, what is worth noting is that the issues raised in the popular culture invite viewers to perform in a certain manner to position themselves in relation to these taboos. The viewers in all the classes (except the affluent middle class) are seen to follow such content that highlights the taboos, and yet resent its representation on screen. In the representation of these issues, the popular culture invites them to revisit their identities as Pakistanis, Muslims and more importantly as women of honourable households. It is evident through readings on taboos in this section, that middle class women in Sohni Chalet continue to emerge as less conservative and more open to different forms of representation in relation to gender, but at the same time they also appear confident in themselves and do not see this potential in gendered content to affect them directly.

4.5 Conclusion:

This chapter has addressed several theoretical questions. The underlying unity in viewers' responses towards 'openness' draws attention towards their fear of losing something like traditional values, norms, modesty, and a collective image

as a nation and as part of an *Ummah*. As cultural citizens, their reaction to this openness translates into a desire for constraints and censorship on gendered content. Nonetheless, their identities as Muslims and as Pakistanis intersect with their identities as women. It raises the question of whether there is a single public for the gender-based content or multiple publics. My position in this regard is that there is still a loose public in relation to gender-based content, however, 'gender' is a rich domain related to identity. It is here that religion, culture and even nationalism intersect while viewers take positions in relation to one of three paradigms (religion, culture or nationalism). Viewers become dormant in relation to one issue while active with regards to the other, a practice heavily facilitated by their subjective positions in society. But this selectivity demonstrates the contradictions in society, where citizens pick and choose between what should be open and what should be concealed.

Class, religiosity, age and spatial dynamics at home intervene in their performances as cultural citizens. For example, the appearance of women on screen comes across not only as a sociocultural issue but also as a religious issue among the housewives. However, older women who have crossed the age of desirability (as per Shariah) do not see its immediate relevance in their lives. Homosexuality on the other hand, does not appear to engage any of the viewers. This is where I argue that viewers engage with issues that have some degree of relevance to their lives and tend to reject or distance from issues that do not speak to their own subjectivities. This issue will be taken up further in relation to an emancipatory potential of gendered content in Chapter 6. The next chapter will look at the dynamics of production of gendered content from producers' perspective. It will look at the economic constraints producers face in an otherwise liberal economy.

Chapter 5

Understanding Production of gender-based content

Chapter 4 looked at the viewers' perspective on openness in gendered content. This chapter will set the stage for the producers' perspective. I will start this chapter by looking at how producers recall content and production dynamics in PTV and then move on to explore the economic imperatives at play in the post-liberalisation era. The chapter also considers how those at the production end view their audiences, and understand the agenda/mechanism of the production relations that shapes the industry. Several dynamics play an important role in prioritising the nature of the content, which goes beyond what producers want to produce, to what they *have* to produce in a given system. Therefore, this chapter gives an idea of the system in which producers are operating. For this purpose, I address four main questions: first' what are the producers' perceptions of their audience; second, how crucial are ratings for the gender-based content; third, where does the actual power lie, that is, whether it is with the advertisers, broadcasters or the production houses; fourth, whether the private media organisations are similar to institutions with a commitment/responsibility towards their public. While addressing these four areas, the chapter engages with the works of scholars such as Todd Gitlin (1985) and Baker and Hesmondhalgh (2011) who have attempted to understand media production in a Western context.

5.1 Recalling PTV:

Since the study deals with the production and the reception of the gender-based content in the post-liberalisation period, it seems important to examine how those on the production side and the reception side recall this transition. For this purpose, viewers' perspective has already been discussed in Chapter 4, here I

will look at how producers recall PTV. The first section looks at the limitations faced by PTV in relation to gendered content, while the second deals with recalling PTV as an elitist medium. The second part of this section deals with how viewers recall PTV.

There are several factors attached to the history of Pakistani state television such as, it has functioned as a tool for government's propaganda for a long time; the agenda for programming is clear; and the concepts are thoroughly worked out. Through the findings of textual analysis and producers' responses, it becomes obvious that in the post-liberalisation era, those at the producing end are experimenting with newer themes to draw ratings, and this strategy for survival in the market contrasts with the motive for production in the state television. Those who were directly involved in the production at PTV and those who are working for the private sector have some vivid memories of Pakistani television culture under PTV. Almost all my interviews and focus groups started with memories of PTV. Consider for example how a young director working for a private production house explains how the public channel prioritises its agenda in content:

SAR 12:20⁶³: Television in Pakistan was launched by a dictator and all he wanted to do was to use it for propaganda. At the time, the programmes were mostly run to nurture a public out there. It would usually portrays the cultural values of our society and would draw attention towards the betterment of this society. These initiatives were at times politically motivated.

⁶³ Please note for extracts of the interviews, I will first introduce the interviewee and give initials as well as minutes/second from the audio files.

The clarity of aim and message on state television, and a sense of commitment towards the public are apparent from the quote above. However, in relation to gender-based content under PTV, there were no clear guidelines in the initial few years, except that religion and women-oriented issues were treated under special programming. With time, the governments tightened their control over the gendered content. Agha Nasir, the ex-managing director of PTV also notes in his recent book on PTV: 'There was a large-scale so called purge which deprived PTV from the contribution of some outstanding writers and talented directors. Policy directives were issued about themes, dress code and even camera treatment of female actors'⁶⁴ (2012: 950). Despite restrictions producers continued working on sensitive themes such as child labour/trafficking (*Hawa Ki Baiti*). In addition, PTV also produced two exclusive projects on family planning (*Aahat* and *Nijaat*) with the clear intention towards taking the message across, and not just drawing consumers for sponsors. Clearly, the execution of such narratives was carried out in a way that it did not come across as obscene, vulgar, or, for that matter, did not disturb the cultural values of the society. A few directors take pride in their treatment of gendered programmes. For instance, Ayub Khawar who has worked for over thirty years for the state channel recalls his working strategies while at the same time comparing it with how creative professionals should make programmes without vulgarising or making them explicit:

AK 44:12: The quality of drama serials was much better in the days of Zia ul Haq, though he was a religiously-inclined dictator, we could still say a lot of things with creativity and grace, unlike today where visuals have become vulgar.

Here, Khawar refers to an important aspect of producing in an environment that did not facilitate free expression. Interestingly, he is not criticising the policy of conservatism or screen, instead he is arguing that their treatment of gender-based issues was far more decent than it is now. During Zia's rule, state television became a constraining space, which served as a mouthpiece for the government's propaganda against democratic forces and also forced upon restrictions on what to say and how to say. In Chapter 1, I discussed how during the 1980s, the Islamisation policy of Zia-ul-Haq directly impacted upon the political culture in the society and this was reflected on screen. A lot has changed since then in Pakistani society, however, the state channel still adheres to certain standards for programming. For example, another senior producer who still works for PTV explains that gender-based issues of controversial nature are usually interpreted in the light of *Shariah*, therefore, PTV is still careful in handling such issues. Kazim Pasha explains:

KP 10:40: On the question of openness in PTV, if we run a theme that does not conform to *Shariah*, the fanatics would protest and may even set us on fire. But we are still able to say a lot. These days the content is like 'in your face'.

Pasha is referring to the limitations state television still faces while producing, in dealing with the pressure groups in society. He also draws attention to the fact that it is not only under the dictatorial regime that PTV takes measures on effective gate-keeping and censorship, but even under democratic regimes. State television cannot speak on issues that do not have representation in the Constitution (such as homosexuality). While comparing openness in visuals on private channels and PTV, Ali Rizvi also mentions how PTV sticks to the conservative code of production. For example:

AR 14:47: You can still not find visuals of smoking on PTV or drinking for it is anyway forbidden in Islam, we are here to reform our society so why should we open up to such things. AR 35:55: We have not yet shown anything around issues of homosexuality on PTV, because it is a family channel and our motive is not that commercial.

Rizvi also expresses how private channels highlight such themes for commercial purposes. In addition, physical proximity among the characters is also something that is not taken as a norm on state television; in fact, senior directors/producers in PTV explain how they worked through such sensitivities without making it look offensive.

It also draws our attention towards the fact that openness in gender-based content is in many ways offensive to the teachings of Islam, and PTV has to deal with several filters such as the Constitution of Pakistan, *Shariah*, culture and other pressure groups (gender movements/nationalist movements/NGOs). In the past, the appearance of women also surrounded the gender-based content in Pakistani television culture, for instance; *dupatta*⁶⁵, which was not a compulsory part of women's wardrobe on screen, became mandatory for women during Zia and Sharif's regime (See for example, Blood 1994; Talib and Idress, 2012). Similarly, any visuals that may demand physical proximity between men and women were also labelled as inappropriate, even if it is a duet between two singers (see for example, Ali, 1986; Nasir, 2012). Interestingly, there was not a single *written* directive given to PTV centres in different cities on *dupatta* policy. During the fieldwork, the producers working for the state television mentioned that any

⁶⁵ A stole that is 2.5 metres in length and at least 1.5 to 2 metres in width worn ideally with shalwar (loose trousers) and qameez (long shirt), is an essential part of national/cultural wear for women

such change in policy was communicated through a phone call to the General Manager of PTV, which was then passed on to different departments.⁶⁶ There were several actors/directors/anchors that discontinued working in such an environment where women actors were shown covering heads with *dupatta* in their bedrooms or even while going to bed. Sahira Kazmi, one of the popular producers/directors/actor in PTV reacted to the *dupatta* policy in this manner: 'I will not cover my head with a *dupatta*! My honour lies in my conviction, not on my head!' (Cited in Kothari, 2005: 290) In their interviews, Haseena Moin (writer) and Sultana Siddiqui (director) also recall such policies 'as senseless with a serious blow to creativity'.⁶⁷ Consider how Nida Pasha mentions:

NP19:30: During the days of PTV, drama serial wasn't too easy to understand and there was only a class (educated) that could understand it really.

Nida Pasha who is currently working as a prominent morning show host in one of the private channels, and whose parents have worked for over thirty years in PTV, noted that the narratives in the state channel were difficult to understand. This refers to two issues: firstly, the strict censorship policy on state television restricted the directors to openly say whatever they want to. The producers relied heavily on metaphors to express anything controversial (in terms of religion, culture or politics). The content in this regard was hard to follow for the ordinary people, one needed to have a certain level of cultural capital (to use Bourdieu's term)⁶⁸. For instance, the issue of wife swapping was raised in the drama serial *Jangloos*, but it did not seem offensive because of its conservative execution. In a similar vein, the writers criticised the governmental policies in a

⁶⁶ Ayub Khawar, Ali Rizvi and Kazim Pasha mentioned that orders were usually passed on to their departments through telephonic instruction from the Capital.

⁶⁷ Moin and Siddiqui on record for this.

⁶⁸ Bourdieu, P. (1973) (2010)

way that it could not be picked easily by all the viewers; the language used was far richer than the spoken version of Urdu. Another angle which is equally important in this regard, invites attention to the question of who formed the viewing public for PTV and how those viewers have increased in numbers as well as fragmented over a period of time. For a long time in Pakistan, only privileged people could afford television. Agha Nasir, the ex-Managing Director of PTV notes in his recent book on PTV that 'there were only 47,000 television set in 1967, which increased to 6,762,733 by 2004⁶⁹'. Therefore, producers had a clear view of the nature of their addressee. These producers were clearly producing for a public with a certain level of cultural and economic competencies to engage with the content.

This section started with how producers recall PTV as an institution with a clear agenda in mind. Apparently, that agenda is to use PTV for state-led propaganda on any issue. The genre of drama serial was also used as a space for reflecting governmental policies. Nothing could be expressed against *Shariah* (even today), however, within that constrained space, the producers managed to address some social issues. These producers/directors hold pride in how they treated certain taboos through symbolic representation. Nonetheless, the young directors/producers relate such treatment to elitism. They criticise PTV for not speaking to the lives of ordinary people. It is also worth noting at this point that in the post-liberalisation period, programming in PTV also changed. The censorship policy of PTV has also mellowed in the last decade with several private productions airing on the state channel. Apparently, the reason for it is that PTV can now use the revenue generated from private production to support and improve the quality of in-house productions (Dawn, 2003 and Shahid, 2014).

⁶⁹ Nasir, Agha (2012) *This is PTV*, p. 38

With its responsibility towards the national interest, PTV is still selective in purchasing private software.⁷⁰

5.2: Perception of the producers about their viewers:

The textual analysis of the gender-based content clearly indicates that the content revolves around the social issues women face in the society and in their personal lives. Taking a lead from this recurrent pattern in the textual analysis, I begin this discussion with the perception of the producers and hosts of the breakfast shows about their viewers. On the question about who are they producing for, Sina Pasha, a director for the breakfast show, mentions that there is an understanding/consensus among the producing team that their target audience are women, who are passive housewives:

SP 05:06: What they are drilling into us or what production houses and channels are briefing to the directors is that majority of your viewers are typical housewives who put food on stove and come sit in front of television until their husbands come back from work who have nothing beyond their kitchens and homes. These women are already there as our viewers, they have already created a market themselves, we have not produced these viewers and we know it from the surveys that are conducted by those who are in the business of advertising, these surveys tell us...

What is evident from the excerpt above is that producers think that there is already an existing market for the kind of content they are producing, and the passive housewives constitute that market. Interestingly, Pasha also notes that neither the producer nor the content has created the audiences; rather they

⁷⁰ See for example, Purchase of software from private sector Available at: <http://www.ptv.com.pk/pdf/GuidingPrinciplesProcedures.pdf>, Accessed: April 21, 2015

identified the invisible, yet existing audiences for a certain content. While probing further on how these producers have come to appreciate that women constitute their audience group, Pasha revealed that the research teams within the channels rely on surveys conducted by their clients/sponsors, but mainly on ratings. Further, Pasha also notes:

SP 5:36: And through the findings of the surveys, we eventually get this feedback that this kind of women who have low IQ level probably not exceeding 4 on a scale of 1 to 10, and are typically dumb.....so we should produce for them.

This shows that the producers also rely on the marketing surveys as an evidence base, for casting the audience as lacking in intelligence. In all the discussions with hosts, except for one, viewers are regarded as superficial and not willing to engage with the intellectual content. On the one hand, it invites our attention to the fact that daily chores and housework are considered as labour of a trivial nature, and on the other hand, it fails to address the question of how they could be regarded as dumb. Not to forget that, it is the same sample of audiences that happens to engage well with issues of social nature in other genres. Moreover, these housewives are not passive in making choices for consumption of the products available on television. For example, as women with relatively low IQ, they are smart enough to choose from the products available through tele-advertising (UniLever versus Engro Foods, or other local brands). In a similar vein, Shaista Wahidi, another host of the breakfast show replied to the question on what is her understanding about her viewers. She suggests that 'my viewers' understanding of development is focussed on how to apply make up properly'. When asked how these women engage with the issues of serious nature raised on your shows, she notes in a contemptuous tone that:

SW 07:00 'oh, who are my viewers, my viewers are women who are either interested in designer wears we give away for calling or texting in these shows. Or they seek pleasure in watching tragic stories about women on shows, however, if you run a show on raising funds for flood victims you will get only 13000 text messages. But if you have a designer wear to give away you get 1 lac text messages, TRPs drop badly with any serious issue, can you imagine? Look at the indifference of these women and their level of intellect, so now you can make sense of who they are....but I don't call these women innocent, they want to live off their husband's pockets, they are stubborn'.

I investigated further, upon which Wahidi explains that her viewers are housewives who can afford the luxury to stay at home and spend through their husband's income and 'also have extra-marital affairs', thus she would not call them innocent but stubborn who do not want to change. In this context, Wahidi's viewers belong to a certain class who are willing to spend for a certain lifestyle. Interestingly, she also points out that the interest in the gender-based stories is purely out of curiosity. During the course of the interview, it becomes clearer that the dynamics of production of the breakfast shows is somewhat complicated where content is driven by the ratings. The hosts of this show had serious reservations regarding the nature of the content, and this is why Wahidi displays an absolute disregard for her viewers. In this case, it can be argued that these viewers may not be living up to the expectations of the host but are certainly conforming to the desired expectations of the broadcasters and the advertisers. This is not something exclusive to the Pakistani context, for Baker and Hesmondhalgh (2011) also find similar frustration and contempt among the creative workers working in the magazine industry, but they relate the issue of

such contempt to how it can also impact upon the 'quality and value' of their work (2011: 200). Further, such an attitude among the creative workers also underestimates audiences' 'capacities for enjoying richer, more interesting, more meaning products' (200).

From the discussion on hosts' perception of their audiences' perception, the section that follows will evaluate how directors for drama serials perceive their audiences. The perception of a viewer who is a woman and belongs to a certain class varies from genre to genre, but there seems to be a consensus on the fact that most of the gender-based content is mainly produced for conservative housewives. One of the directors of the drama serials has derived his understanding of a viewer through the briefings he gets from the producers and also the broadcasters. He notes that:

SAR 38:48: Right now, channels have certain demands, I am making softwares for such a female viewer, who is a typical house wife, whose husband would give her a limited amount for the day's grocery and who either covers herself with a *chador* or wears a *burqah*⁷¹ while leaving her home and she may also be the one who wishes for many things in a day but cannot afford even one of it. We are making that woman even more intolerant, and this is still something that producers are not doing deliberately.

This is an interesting revelation because the consumer for the popular culture appears to be a conservative woman who perhaps follows the religion as well.

⁷¹ Outer cloak worn by Muslim women in Pakistan similar to Abaya.

Syed Ali Raza raises the issue that while catering to typical viewers, producers are not deliberately creating a market for such audiences. By that, he means to suggest that production houses as well as broadcasters are committed to facilitate a certain system of production without understanding the consequences it may have for the quality of the viewers and also the content. It can be argued that those working in the private broadcasting channels heavily depend on their advertisers for revenue generation, and therefore, their understanding of viewers is directly related to the ratings systems in the industry. Moreover, he also mentions that the content they are producing can make women more intolerant. On probing this particular observation, he argues that on the one hand, content is selling an expensive lifestyle, while on the other, the content shows morbidity on screen. However, it also draws attention towards the kind advertising in gender-based content. Mainly, 'five telecom companies alone account for almost 30% of ad revenues' (Bhushan, R and Pande, B, 2011).⁷² Product placement is also becoming popular in recent years. In a few sitcoms, Bulbulay, Q-Mobile and 50/50 Biscuits are used as products to be advertised within the sitcom. However, this trend is a regular feature in breakfast shows, where a cooking segment is sponsored by certain oil companies and brand ambassadors for brands like Always and Nestle, who are also invited as guests to promote their new products. During the summer months, breakfast shows promote brands for lawn prints (lighter cotton), some of which are also brands launched by the hosts in their shows (See for example, Qamar, 2015)⁷³. In this way, hosts also promote their own brands on their shows. Apart from Pakistani ads, local channels also use ads

⁷² Bhushan, R and Pande, B (2011) Making ads in Pakistan: Tough with many formal and informal censors, *The Economic Times* [Online], November 6, Available at:

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-11-06/news/30364129_1_advertising-industry-top-ad-international-advertising-association (Accessed: 22 April, 2015)

⁷³ Qamar, S. (2015) There is nothing surprising about me launching Aamir Liaquat *The Express Tribune* [Online] April 11, Available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/868145/there-is-nothing-surprising-about-me-launching-lawn-aamir-liaquat/> (Accessed: April 21, 2015)

made by Indian advertisers for certain product such as Rubicon, Head and Shoulders, Palmolive soap.⁷⁴

In order to probe this perception of the viewership of gendered content further, I asked the Content Heads for scripts and concepts in three different channels to comment on women as their supposed/preconceived viewers. They replied:

AI 21:12: Actually, we have decided that women are the only viewers that we have, so now we are working on their emotional faculties, by either making them cry or by selling dreams to them. (ARY Channel)

AM 16:40: Our drama serial is so urbanised; we are only creating for viewers in urban areas of Pakistan. (Express TV)

ES 04:20: See, there is no 'public' out there, we are playing with the consumers and that's it...but I wish it could be 'common man's medium'. (Geo Channel)

Ali Imran (AI), the Content Head in the ARY Channel, engages in a candid discussion on how industry is producing for women. He also suggested that those at the production side are also creating a certain kind of viewer who has an appetite for gendered content. He points towards the sensitive dimension involved in producing for women whereby the producer offers window for either catharsis for women or escape. Meanwhile, Ali Moin, who is the Head of Content and Scripts in the Express Channel refers to another important dimension in the industry where drama serials are produced for the viewers in

⁷⁴ See for example, Pakistan and Radical Islam's Hate on non-Muslims (2014) uploads Pak Media analysis on Indian Advertisements in Pakistani Channels, Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPCU3E99gvE> (Accessed: April 21, 2015)

the cities, and the argument is quite convincing because private channels do not have the same reach as that of terrestrial channels (such as PTV and ATV) in Pakistan. In addition to this, there are hardly any ratings' meters installed in the rural areas.⁷⁵ Dr Enver Sajjad, who is Head of Scripts in the Geo Channel, expresses his reservation for being part of the system that produces for consumers only, which in some ways invited attention towards the fact that the consumer he has identified in this process, is clearly different from the citizen he would ideally want to address. There are two angles to this argument, one that states that producers are catering to the demands of the consumers defined by the advertisers but also that it is not the public they wish to produce for. Although this depicts a bleak picture for those who want to produce for a public rather than the consumers, but in their responses (especially those of Wahidi, Khawar and now Sajjad), there is an implied longing for that public.

Holding a low opinion of the viewers or considering them intellectually deficient in certain ways is not just restricted to the anchors. In fact, it is the perception that is originally derived from the ratings and the advertisers' surveys, that prevails at a higher level, which filters down to the hosts and is extended to the production homes to produce for a certain kind of viewer. Consider, for instance, how Badar Ikram, the Business Unit Head of Geo, who has a crucial role in influencing the content of the morning shows and drama serials in the channel responded to my question on his perception of viewers:

BI 30:19: You have to understand that the viewer in Pakistan is at the IQ level of an eight year old. They used to call Benazir as corrupt leader when she was alive, now they cry for her.

⁷⁵ This information is retrieved from the interview with Noman Fazal, the CEO of Media Logic

In strengthening his point, the example given by Ikram is an interesting take on the power of media in manipulating realities/perception of the audiences. The point he is making is that the media manipulated the audiences into believing that Benazir was a corrupt leader and after her death, media glorified her to the extent that she is mourned by the majority. Moreover, it reinforces the opinion of the producers that they are better aware and their audiences are not just ignorant but also naïve. Ikram also raised the issue of the class variables attached to the composition of the audience in question.

BI 15:17: Television is dumbing down. It used to be a luxury that a few people could afford; now even a roadside hawker would have it ... BI 18:20: India has more trash to offer than us, but now our television is talking to the lowest common denominator. Simple talk, colloquial language and some slangs in language can be related to easily than anything sophisticated or decent. Either I decide to remain in high art market and be driven out or I can talk to the lowest common denominator, there has to be a balance though.

In the passage above, 'high art market' refers to the culture of the state channel that meets the standards for sophisticated and decent speech and language. It also refers to the discussion in Chapter 4 about how the television viewers have increased over a period of 40 years. Television started off as an expensive commodity with target viewers of a certain economic class that could afford it. During the fieldwork, those practitioners who have worked for the state channel referred to it as a medium for the educated class (see for example, Chapter 1). In a similar vein, Badar Ikram argues that the viewers of the private broadcasting channels are spread across the socio-economic classes in the society. In catering to all segments of the society, his channel has deliberately altered the content to

cater to the popular tastes. He explains a situation of no escape for those at the producing end, for they are operating in an industry that runs on the principle of revenue generation, and they have already been given the understanding of who their viewers are, and in order to sustain them, they have to produce content that draws ratings. This raises a few questions in relation to the nature of the content. Firstly, it stresses that the state channel produced for the educated class (despite its reach in the rural areas where the literacy is quite low). Secondly, the popular culture has simply redefined the media landscape, yet the producers have a very low opinion of their consumers.

This section has looked at how the hosts of the breakfast shows, directors of the drama serials, the content heads of the scripts and the CEO of Geo TV conceptualise their audience. By and large, the producers perceive that women, who are typical housewives, form the actual group for their audiences. There is a variation in the responses of the hosts who opine that a certain class that watches these shows is indifferent to the issue-based shows and engages with the lifestyle segments of these shows, and one other who mentions that women of all classes watch her show. For the directors of drama serials, it is the women who form the actual group of viewers, and producing for another group can be risky. The content heads raise the dilemma of having to produce for consumers, yet have a desire to produce for a public is also present. The reason for producing for consumers with an average IQ level is that today the market has expanded enormously in relation to the viewers and it has diversified, in terms of their constitution. Gone are the days when a minority could afford television and therefore television has dumbed down in its content to cater to the lowest common denominator.

5.3: The trend of seeking better ratings:

This section will attempt to understand the importance of the ratings' factor for producers, content and the pressures it brings along for those who are working in the media industry at any level. The content in general and the content of breakfast shows in particular depends upon the system of ratings. Sina Pasha described how content of breakfast shows was driven by the trends in ratings:

SP 11:17: Daily themes on the show were mostly dictated from above by the CEO of the channel. The issue of thalassemia is close to his heart, so we run shows on it, and weddings. Wedding week is the essential feature of the morning shows, and it is when you gain maximum ratings for any show. Ratings have definitely told us one thing that women crave for sequences for wedding, whether it is in drama serial or in breakfast shows...We also started bringing on fake victims of domestic politics (home) just to give a boost to our ratings, and the formula clicked. SP 32:55: It was nothing, just to have better ratings, initially we did not have this pressure but once we touched the scale of 2.4 in ratings, we were also in it. We expect nothing except that they (viewers) watch and give boost to the ratings.

Wedding seasons run on all breakfast shows where platforms for the shows are used for the weddings of the under-privileged such as victims of burns, and girls living in the shelter homes. The broadcasters and the sponsors bear the expenses of these weddings. Pasha reveals that most of the time CEO dictates the themes. She even mentions that this can even be a last minute thing, where the CEO gives a directive on the topic of the show. From how Pasha describes the situation, the 'last minute directive' implies undue stress and uncertainty for the production

team. However, it also implies that the executives have unlimited power and no regard for the preparation and research it takes to get an issue on screen. This is not something new in the television industry. Todd Gitlin also highlights similar issues. He relates uncertainty 'to a more general uncertainty about how to proceed in a business that offers so little firm grounding in ethics, aesthetics or rationality.' (1985: 22)

Nida Pasha who is the anchor of the same show differs on this while stating that she has full control over the content. Sina Pasha also brings forth the factor of running fake gender-based stories on domestic politics, and this became one of the main reasons for her leaving the show.⁷⁶ In our discussion, Sina Pasha mentions how she would prefer directing a drama serial than a false situation on the breakfast show packaged in a way that it appears to be true. This was a matter of frustration for Sina Pasha where she had to reproduce and create something for the content. Not only does Sina Pasha openly express her reservations over the central issue of trivialising the content, there are others, especially the hosts working in this genre who are also critical of bringing on fake cases of domestic politics. A few admit that they are doing it for the sake of ratings while others (Shaista Wahidi and Sawaira Nadeem, Faisal Qureishi) alienate themselves from the practice saying that this is common in the industry but they have not fallen for this trend. However, Nida Pasha and Shaista Wahidi, highlight how ratings directly affect the issue of experimenting with the themes in their shows:

⁷⁶ Note that domestic politics is different from domestic violence. In case of domestic politics, the situations that are created on the interactive breakfast shows feature two aggrieving parties such as mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law or husbands and wives. They bring their matter to these shows and a heated exchange of words take place between them. It is similar to the Jerry Springer Show but varies in the issues and treatment of the topics. However, all the cases of domestic violence are genuine and real who approach these spaces to seek protection and this project is particularly interested in genuine/real cases.

SW 06:40: I try to do something different, but I have pressures from the channel heads, sponsors as well as the ratings and if I do something of my choice, then only 2 percent of my viewers will watch my show, and my channel heads would ask me to leave after six months, saying thank you very much, now we have someone else who can dance better than you and is much more prettier but I will still not stage the drama other anchors create by bringing fake cases.

NP 38:20: These days you have to take your viewers seriously, because of ratings ...the ratings bring the anchors into a lot of stress, that it can even ruin their family lives, and it has done so in the past, we have examples. I don't think I will be able to do it for long.

The second issue of concern in relation to ratings was that of the pressures it brings for the host. Although in case of the breakfast shows, viewers are expected to be committed to a certain host who, not only has celebrity value, but is also in-charge of the content. However, as mentioned in the extracts above, the hosts often face pressures from above to deliver ratings. While working in another industry in the West, Baker and Hesmondhalgh also find that 'ratings pressure finds its way down the hierarchy' (2011: 213). In fact, Wahidi is trying to draw our attention towards the quality of the content in a ratings-driven system, and the extent to which she has to surrender to the demands of the market, but she is vocal about the level of compromise in case of content. There is a clear sense of limitation in creative autonomy in an industry that is purely committed to revenue generation. What is more apparent is the lack of sense of security for the jobs of those creative workers who wish to do something different. Wahidi is also referring to a trend in the industry whereby broadcasters hire and fire the faces who fail to deliver the desired ratings for a show, and the reason for this is that the sponsors directly influence the slot for the morning shows, either through

integration of products, or promoting brands on shows. This particular slot offers them maximum number of viewers. At the moment, breakfast show is supposed to be the only genre through which channels exact/generate all their salaries. In other words, this genre bears the burden of generating maximum revenue for the broadcasters; therefore, the production teams for this genre work under the constant pressure of delivering ratings. These hosts come across as having strong personalities but on the other hand, they share their fears of being forced out of the market for not delivering ratings.

Nida Pasha brings up another angle that the pressure of ratings has affected the hosts' personal lives. In fact, there have been three cases in a row where hosts of the breakfast shows have been divorced. Nida Pasha also expresses her fear of reaching a point where her home gets disturbed due to the pressures of her show (mainly referring to survive in a competitive market). However, Nida Pasha, who was, at the time of the interview, a new entrant as an anchor for the morning show defends her position saying that she is open to bringing forth fake cases, for it serves the purpose to raising an issue and hooks the audiences, which gives her show ratings. However, at a later point in the interview, she suggests that she may as well stand up to the issue of quality of the content being compromised when she finds her position strong in the competitive market. There is also a different ethical issue involved in this kind of content where producers create an illusion of reality without the knowledge of the viewers and also in the actual cases of rape, where victims unveil their faces, but where these are ratings' induced trends:

NP 18:00: It is true that responsibility should lie with the broadcaster but we have to sell our product too, we do get selfish at times (showing rape victims' faces) to get ratings. We are in a market we have to sell too... it is a mixture of everything.

This approach towards drawing ratings raises ethical issues, whereby hosts invite victims of gender abuse on shows with an apparent intention to facilitate the law-enforcing authorities and courts for speedy trials and to give awareness to the viewers on such issues. However, delving deeper into the intentions of the hosts/producers of such shows, it comes to the fore that despite the willingness to produce something that is more cerebral, they are more committed towards drawing ratings or in other words protecting their jobs.

The viewers in particular also take up this issue of unveiling victims. (See for example: Chapter 7) Moving on, I will now look at the ethical dimension of showing rape victims' faces on crime shows and how it is related to the ratings-driven content. Asim Naseer, who is the producer and the content head of *Shabbir Toh Dekhay Ga*, a popular crime show, describes this practice as:

AN 24:35: If there is a woman who wants to show her face, and feels that showing face wouldn't affect her or would instead give her protection then we shall show her face.But there is one more angle to it, there is a huge difference in print and electronic media, unless you show the face, you wouldn't have the same impact you wanted for the show....showing faces; yes, for us it is also about ratings too.

Naseer defends his strategy by stating that at times it is not primarily about the ratings; rather showing faces can also protect the victim's life. He also draws attention to the different attributes of the audiences for a different media. Perhaps the point he is making is that the viewers want to see more than they want to hear or read (ticker/crawler) on screen.

Kifayat Rudini is an exception in this case and recalls how ratings have become important for the writers as well as the producers in the industry.

KR 10:50: Post 2002, we have this huge influence of Indian soaps and seeing that the advertising/marketing department in the channels and production houses too, decided to come up with what should be added to our soaps and drama serials to make them more engaging to draw more ratings.

He explains that though he is writing on topics that appeal to him but part of it comes from the fact that production houses need ratings, and that his extended serial (*Kaash*) which was on air at the time of my fieldwork had been sanctioned another 100 episodes on the basis of its popularity. Another case in point is the popular and an award winning drama serial *Roag* on child rape, which has been appreciated within the industry and among the viewers' sample for this project. Baba Javed, the director who is also the CEO of one of the production houses, states:

BJ 23:52: See, ratings are very important, if there is a quality script and if broadcaster refuses to take it for it may not deliver ratings, then what will you do, you have to work on ratings.... BJ 48:30: Do you think I would have thought of making *Roag II*, had there been no ratings? At the end of the day, figures count, when you get figures on ratings telling that this is working for you, then I will make a similar project. There is simply no other parameter to assess what is appreciated, do

you think even 750 household where these meters are installed give us the standard? Among the 225 meters installed in Karachi, most of these meters are installed in SEC C, D and E. There are hardly 50 meters in installed in Defence Housing Authority and its vicinity. Whatever is watched among the masses, qualifies for 'hit'. Advertisers directly deal with the system of ratings, we in production houses are asked to make something on this topic or that formula which is working for ratings.⁷⁷

Babar Javed raises some interesting issues in the discussion on ratings, first; he suggests that producing a sequel for *Roag* will be successful because the original project delivered ratings. Making a sequel for a 'hit' drama serial can also be risky. Javed attempted to make a sequel for *Mera Saein* (My lord)⁷⁸, which did not deliver in terms of ratings. Therefore, it can be argued that falling for an already established trend or working on an old formula can sometimes not work in favour of the producers. There is always a measure of uncertainty involved in following a trend (See for example, Hesmondhalgh, 2006: 225, for a detailed discussion on uncertainty in production). Many trends in the industry are derived from the 'hit formula' or the axioms that run in the industry. In Gitlin's (1985) study, Scott Siegler, CBS vice-president for drama development mentions that 'there are countless axioms that you hear in programming, and I think the

⁷⁷ Panel Home in different cities: Karachi 225; Lahore 175; Islamabad 100; Faisalabad 50; Hyderabad 25; Sukkur 25; Gujranwala 25; Multan 25; Peshawar 25; Total: 675

Socio Economic Class Representation: SEC A 10%, SEC B 14%, SEC C 21%, SEC D 25%, SEC E 30%

Where A represents the highest income group while E represent the lowest (Obtained from the Media Logic Company)

⁷⁸ *Mera Saein* is a serial that is popular for showing the tribal culture that violates the rights of women. The story revolves around a feudal lord who marries multiple times for a male heir.

one thing that you begin to learn is that all those axioms represent are precedents that have been set, but not necessarily rules that work' (23). Moreover, there is always a measure of unpredictability in the viewing practices. It is always risky to reduce viewers into aggregates that simply tune in to a particular slot, because that can never inform us about the viewing experience of these viewers. Javed also reveals that the production houses are usually advised by broadcasters on the formula or trend that can draw ratings for their product. Others also endorse this idea in the industry that a line is given to the production houses, which is then taken forward by the producers to the writers. Third factor that is raised here is that of who determines the actual viewership of the content. The trends in ratings have confirmed to the sponsors, broadcaster and the producers that it is usually socio-economic groups with less income that popularise the shows through watching - only 10% of the meters are installed in the affluent areas of Karachi, that is, where SEC A and B live. Hence, on the one hand there is a sense of lack of credibility in the sample size of the audiences; while on the other hand, is a situation of no escape, mainly because there is no other yardstick to measure the popularity, and more importantly, quality of the content.

Therefore, the industry produces for the 'semi-predictable audiences' (Ang, 1991) and ratings solely determine the exchange of commodities among the broadcasters, production homes and the advertisers (Meehan 1986). In this regard, I would argue that ratings is also one of the prime commodities that makes the industry go round, the content in particular depends upon it. This commodity exchange also obscures the unpredictability of the audiences. Moreover, it can also be argued that the sample size is also not representative of the audience as argued by Napoli (2012) in her critique of system of measurement of the audiences. As I mentioned above, in case of *Mera Saeen II*, the content did not deliver, and the same audience sample rejected this serial. However, the

actual constitution of the audience gets masked behind the sample audience of the raters.

Ali Moin also voiced his concerns over the system of ratings in Pakistani industry:

AM 07:55: It is a country where we do not know how many people watch television, where your sample size is 225 households, and this model of rating decides for all the businesses in the media industry. And this system of rating has so evolved and branded into something that you have to follow. See this is fake, this is like a phantom circuit that does not actually exist.....AM 32:58: Who tells you that all that is popular is acceptable to all, who is telling us this, except for the scam created by the system of ratings.

The system of ratings offered by Media Logic is so established and delivering to the satisfaction of the advertisers that all programmes need its sanction to qualify for being popular, where popular does not mean of a high standard. Also, the population and demographics of the city is such that critics do not agree with the sampling of the viewers. This particular methodology favours revenue-generating departments in the channels, and the advertiser; therefore, calling it a hoax is also not true, rather it is about the perspective of the people in the business. It also reinforces the prejudice of the creative side of production towards its targetted audiences; it seems that they want to alienate themselves for the popular demands and create a market for themselves among the educated, and a certain economic class who are at the same intellectual level as these creative people. Yet, there is a degree of craving for the appreciation of the semi-predictable sample. Investigating it further, I followed this issue of ratings with those at the sales and the marketing side of production. Fawwad Azeem,

the Senior Director Marketing in the Geo Channel who explains that their methodology is ratings driven and that the department of marketing and sales directly influence the content for this purpose:

FA 22: 22: I don't think independent producer is powerful in this media industry. 24:20: Our committee rules the content and 70% of our content is ratings' driven. FA32:00: We are in this war of ratings and revenue but, PEMRA should regulate whether the market has that potential to absorb more channels or not.

While drawing attention to the absence of the role of Pakistan Electronic and Media Regulating Body, Azeem asserts that the industry is evolving and operating on its own. In this context, the media industry is operating without any checks and balances from the government or even another autonomous media regulatory body that could offer a standard for the quality programming. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the government immediately intervenes or shows reservation if news channels dare to push the boundaries of what is acceptable in terms of freedom of speech in relation to politics and religion. (See for example, Chapter 1) Those who are directly involved in the production of gender-based content have limited freedom to work according to their own creative rationale (if any). The Senior Sales Director, Agha Fasiullah in Hum TV argues that the creative professionals (producers/hosts/writers/directors) does not come up with creative and original ideas and even if they do, they lack the expertise to market those ideas on screen. As a result, the creative side is bound to depend heavily on the sales/marketing departments. There is a constant tension between the creative workers and the marketing side of the industry. The creative workers lament the fact that those working on the marketing side cannot appreciate 'quality work'. However, those at the marketing side argue that not

only do they know about their own but also about 'what qualifies for creativity'. Others on the creative side also mention that sales/marketing influence the content directly. Fawwad Azeem explains this phenomenon in this sense:

FA 15:50: In terms of content, *Geo Hina Kay Sath* may be of social value, but the content does not have the factor or something that our advertisers need. We measure the efficiency of any software with revenue as well as rating, if we do see high ratings, then we increase the rates for this slot. ... but this is debatable we take our points to the table and the content side brings their points.

The case in point is that of *Geo Hina Kay Sath*, that had a format closer to the public sphere with an underlying agenda to create debates/discussion and make citizens aware of gender-based issues in Pakistani society, but it was pulled off the screen for it lacked the sellable factor. The departments of sales/marketing directly influence the time slotting of any shows because their clients (sponsor) closely observe how slotting impacts the sales of their products. Again, this is not something unique to the Pakistani market, similar findings have been recorded in case of ABC and CBS. In fact, Gitlin notes that 'when the top programmers know they want to pick up a show, they often ask the sales department's advice about where on the schedule to put it anywhere.' (1985: 59) The team of marketing and sales in any channel often influences the decisions in selection of the content but if the creative side of the content is confident about delivering ratings, then the marketing department does not intervene with the selection. In these discussions with sales and marketing teams, as well as on the production side, the idea of 'sellable factor' emerged again and again.

5.4: Importance of sellable/selling factor in any gendered content:

Having identified the trend to highlight the gender-based issues in all the genres, I engaged in discussions with the writers, who are quoted in Chapter 6 to have based their storylines on reality-based issues, for personal as well as for social reasons. However, when they are asked to comment on the apparent obsession with the gender-based themes on Pakistani screen, they point towards the demand of the market and see the gendered turn to the themes as being commercially motivated. Kifayat Rudini, who raises the issue of 'selling a bride' into marriage reveals that:

KR 15:30: Drama serial is the opium of the women viewers ... the kind of narratives we are offering are purely for the commercial reason.

If Rudini and other writers are writing on gender-based issues such as rape, incest and *halala*, it is for commercial purposes only. In a similar vein, Fasih Bari, a renowned writer who is critical of the trend of producing narratives that are based on miseries of women notes that:

FB 28:25: Producers also want the narratives around miserable women who are suppressed and they want similar stories.

Bari mentions that he acknowledges the trend yet resists it therefore experiments with newer themes; however, I would argue that even then he could not detach himself completely from such a trend. His narratives are relatively open in terms of addressing issues of sexuality in Pakistani culture, but recently, to serve the purpose of ratings, one of his drama serials has turned into an extended serial currently on air with its 158th episode. In one of the follow-up discussions with

Fasih Bari, I seek his opinion on what role ratings play in the drama serial, to which he replies:

‘The broadcasters have increased the episodes of my drama serial for it is giving ratings, and I have no issues with it, I am writing but I am also enjoying writing it up... people have left their hypocrisy, they have started speaking up on such issues (sexuality).

In Bari’s serial, the selling factor is not about the misery of women but sexuality. For example, in some of his recent works such as *Behkawa*, he raises the issue of incest. In yet another one (*Qudussi Sahab ki Bewa*), he raises the issue sexual ambivalence, where a character cross-dresses as a woman. Even if it is for the sake of ratings, such content has broken the long-term silence on issues of sexuality.

Ali Moin, the Content Head of scripts and concepts who has several reservations about the constraining system, notes how tragedy is used as a commodity.

AM 00:38: Drama has changed completely in ten years, and we seek this morbid pleasure in viewing tragedy. Tragedy is the commercial commodity, and it is the basic mold for drama serial around which we execute gendered themes.

The question for the producers is mainly to sell, and while I interview people working in different capacities in the media industry of Pakistan, there appears to be a stark difference in how writers perceive the system and how those at the sale/marketing side of production view it. Ali Moin argues in the interview that

'what I have identified as the gender-based content' has little more value in the narrative than as a product in demand. It addresses a crucial issue regarding the content that is central for this project; despite the unintended consequences and impact it may have for the viewers, the producers are only selling the themes in question for revenue.

Another identified trait in the drama serials aired on ARY Channel is that of negativity, in which the protagonist/principal character is shown, not only to be negative but also successful in his life. Usually such characters are shown to be exploiting women around them and Faisal Tamanna, who is the President Sales in the ARY Channel, defends his channel's strategy in such a manner:

FT 09:49: About negativity in drama serials and gender-based issues raised on ARY: you have to understand that as a people, our psyche is negative, and these characters exist in our society. 11:00: We want to expose negativity and then make it debatable but it is sellable too.

This stance is interesting in some ways for it identifies that negativity is used as a sellable factor but at the same time negative characters reflect the reality of our society. In this manner, even tragedy may be used as an abstract commodity but it also speaks directly to the realities on ground. There is another angle to it as well. Tragedy and negativity have already been established as time tested and relatively less risky themes in terms of drawing ratings.

In a very open and crude manner, Khalid Ahmed, renowned writer, actor, director who has been in the industry for thirty years demystifies the reality of the gender-based content on screen:

KA 04:48: Bibi⁷⁹, the gendered content that you are looking is about consumerism, certain kind of content/certain taste/certain clothes are sellable in their scripts, and I think producers are aware of this phenomenon, but I don't see any attempt to resist the tide. KA14:45: If one's purpose is to sell to a product (in this case drama), then selling needs reinforcement of status quo.

Further, in the interview, he expresses his reservations on gender-based content by calling it 'an opium art' which does not allow critical thinking on issues. Instead of enriching the discourse on the gender-based issues; it reinforces the existing thoughts/norms. He also mentions how creative people in the industry who have critical insight on these issues have been pushed to the fringes for they are unable to comply with demands of the market. I would argue that even in this constraining space being run by the rules of the sponsors, there is always a small opening for creativity. For example, the issue of personal autonomy with regard to sexual orientation is one such area that gets occasional space on television (though not in the prime time).

5.5: Where does the actual power lie/who has the actual control over gendered content?

The debate about who has the ultimate power in the industry (should it be willing to exercise) depended upon the interviewers' capacity in the industry, but there was a silent consensus that advertisers pump in the money/revenue for the broadcasters and therefore they have the power. However, in this complicated mechanism of production one may as well understand that sponsors/clients are directly in touch with the sales/marketing department in the broadcasting

⁷⁹ Polite way of addressing a woman.

channels. And, as the revenue generating department they have a higher say in Product Development.⁸⁰ Khalid Ahmed notes:

KA 00:42: These days television has been appropriated by advertisers. Art and creativity is no longer at the heart of it. It is the sales and marketing department that tells the 'Content Head' to run certain themes commission drama serial on particular themes 02:50: Obviously, marketing heads are MBAs, and they have nothing to do with creativity in content.

There is a strong argument here that those in the media industry are often not trained in media studies, in fact far from it. The marketing department have personnel trained in marketing and business studies, but now fresh business graduates who have translated production into the idiom familiar to them, head even the creative departments. Recalling his time in the state channel and at the beginning of the liberalisation of media, a director who has requested to anonymise his name notes:

AK 19:20: There was a time when we decided what to show and what not to show. We were powerful then; now marketing department is telling us. If you want to sell some strong content then you have to defend your content in a way that it convinces the marketing department. I should not be named but presence of a girl would preferably sell the content. Once, I took my project to the marketing

⁸⁰ The department of Product Development commonly referred to as 'problem development' by the creative people is responsible to identify the qualities in the content that would appeal to the advertisers and deliver ratings. It also deals with the marketing of the finished product/software received from the production houses. (Hina Bayat and Fawwad Azeem's transcript explained in detail)

department and told the outline which was based on a serious issue.

In the end, I mentioned, for you I have 'a girl's character' to sell.

This director is recalling his time with the state channel when directors and producers decided the content. Apparently, this seems to be a contradiction for it comes across as if producers had more power than the government. However, what it actually means is that the state channel worked on the subscription model therefore pressure from the sponsors was limited. He is also pointing to the fact that in a highly commercialised medium, presence of the female gender becomes an essential feature for selling. In this way, liberalisation of media has its own weaknesses where on the one hand, producers are allowed to open up on gender-based issues, while on the other hand, this permissiveness in the content is manipulated through the market. In the state channel, the writers wrote on issues of politics and also on history of Indo-Pakistan, while this trend is clearly missing in the drama serials now. Those on the creative side of production do not seem to be happy with this liberalisation of the content; for them this policy has not translated into speaking on any issue of relevance. Rather it has restricted them to speak only on market-oriented issues. Speaking on the level of autonomy that he has in his work, Ali Moin, the Content Head at Express, describes it in this way:

AM 29:30: I am Head of the scripts, and if I will be assertive about what I want to show, I will be made redundant. So how do we set the ball in rolling is to squeeze in, if there are ten serials not up to our standard, we would include one or two serial of our choice.'

In fact, he mentions that two out of ten scripts are usually of his choice and interestingly the marketing department does not object to these. The creative workers in the industry describe the situation as dark for those who want to produce quality work. It can also have roots in their training within the state channel, which was regarded as elitist with no popular content in it. On the question about what it is that they want to produce, two content heads (in Express Channel and ARY Channel) explain that these days the stories do not reflect the transition in the political sphere and also the economic sphere. Realities are changing at a rapid pace and the genre of drama serial is not able to depict that.

Those who are working on the marketing/sale side of the channels also express the fears they come across in the media industry. For instance, Badar Ikram, who is the Managing Director and also the Business Unit Head of Geo, is supposedly the most powerful person in the channel. From all the interviews conducted in Geo Channel, I find that Ikram has the final say in the content, whether it is about trivialising the issue to draw ratings or to discontinue anything on air:

BI 09:10: I am the one who takes the call, because I have to decide how far the content has to be message oriented. If there is a split between the content and the sales, then I am in the middle. If we will not generate revenue, then we may shut down, our sponsors are driving us, and we do not get any other subsidy as well, so primarily, we are a commercial organization but, we are here to stay for a long time too. It would still be naïve to assume that we are very powerful at the producing end, market is bigger than us and we should not fall into the fallacy that we can control them.

Ikram is a relatively younger executive in the industry who seems to be confident about what he is doing. (See for example Gitlin, 1985: 21, on young and confident executives). Clearly, Ikram is pointing towards the principal stakeholders in the media industry, which in this case are the advertisers/sponsor. It is quite evident that even those who are said to have the power within the channels, and who often dictate and influence the content and those below them, also come across as fearful of the pressures of the market which in this case is run by advertisers/sponsors and also the channel heads. What comes across as the only single rule of the game is to generate revenue and like any other business it brings those in the key positions within the channels into a lot of pressure (See for example: Baker and Hesmondhalgh, 2008, 2011). Yet it may also be noted that there is simply no intention or motivation to resist these pressures at the highest level in the channels. The broadcasters in this case are also party to this system, which is committed to the logic of the market first and then to 'provide entertainment, infotainment or any other role that media may have'. This is what I have argued in Chapter 2 (*Conceptual Framework*), that the *agenda setting* plays a huge role in producing gender-based content. So far, the findings suggest that *agenda setting* is based on the logic of supply and demand. In fact, in other channels, Faisal Tamanna the President of Sales/Marketing in ARY and Arif Hussain, the Chief Operating Officer/President Sales in Hum TV respond to the question of where the actual power lies in the industry in such a manner:

AH 09:00: Eventually, channel heads tilt towards sales and revenue department Content Head should take on board sales before launching an idea, asking whether it would cater to clients or not. No matter, how much you develop content, channels need revenue.

FT 28:49: Content heads should share before working on concepts, because private companies are run on the basis of commercial objective than on social value.

With absolute clarity in mind and some disregard for the creative dimension of production (that is creativity), the sales heads assert that in a business run on commercial objective, the products need to have the right ingredients which can be identified by marketing/sale departments. This is a debate within the industry as well and there appears to be a lot of reservation on the part of writers, directors, as well as the creative heads and content heads within the channel on such influences from the sales/marketing teams. In the private television industry, sponsors have enormous power to dictate, facilitate and reinforce the existing system, which is why, another director/senior producer of state television stressed that the power of sponsors could be toppled:

KP 00:53: If channels are to be blamed for the vulgarity in content then you have to blame the sponsors as well as those consumers who are buying products of Uni Lever. If our consumers discontinue using their products and form a pressure group, then you may see a change in the policy....

In this discussion on who has the actual power, Kazim Pasha draws attention towards an important variable of audiences. The stance that advertisers/sponsors are the actual propellers of the media industry is true to a large extent, but it does not, in any way reduce the importance/role of the audiences (as consumers), especially in a country like Pakistan where religiously-inclined

people/movements often take to the streets to protest against the invasion of market by transnational corporations.

The production houses are taken as factories for producing tailor-made content for broadcasters. In these interview transcripts those who have used the word factories for production houses, meant it in a derogatory way, for they were of the view that mass production of drama serials is taking its toll on creativity. At the time of the fieldwork, two production houses were considered as brand names for any ratings' drawing serials. In the year 2011 and 2012, ARY had three slots of primetime assigned to A and B Production House. The CEO of A and B Production in his interview also reinforced the idea that production houses have become stronger than the channel by saying this:

BJ 24:30: There used to be a time when channels were powerful, but now production houses are powerful.

By powerful, I read this to mean 'manipulative and bargaining on its own terms'. For instance, taking the primetime slots over the weekends and also selling some serials of a lesser standard to the channels. One of the insiders to the industry, who has requested to be kept anonymous mentions that the CEO of their channel has invested in one of these production houses and therefore promised three days to the production house of his choice. Ayub Khawar, who is the senior producer/director in Geo Entertainment, and oversees the production of drama serials also reveals that if broadcasters sign a contract with a particular production house for an agreed period to give them bi-weekly slot or more, it can become risky for the channel:

AK 48:00: These productions houses are like factories who are selling their soft wares to the market.... 49:31: When they begin with a project, they invest in it, but as it progresses they compromise on the quality and the channel comes into a situation of compromise.

In such cases, where episodes have been commissioned to an independent production house and it does not deliver the desired results, the channel's position becomes weak for it cannot generate revenue from such programmes. On the other hand, the production homes are also working on the contract basis not only with the broadcasters but also with the actors. Khawar is particularly referring to the case of *Ek Hatheli Par Hina Ek Hatheli Per Lahu*, a serial based on Shia Sunni riots in Pakistan. After a few episodes, ratings dropped but serial completed its 23 weeks (See, Caves, 2003:81-82, for a discussion on contract theory with particular reference to hiring of the actors). This section gives a clear sketch of how the production of drama serials is undertaken in the industry. It shows that the major stakeholders in the production of drama serials are the sponsors, followed by the production houses that are commissioned to produce drama serials. Those working on the creative side of production do not seem to be satisfied with the rules of the liberal market. In the section that follows, I aim to look at the producers' take on media's role as the public sphere.

5.6: Whether media organizations are similar to the institutions/mediated public sphere with inherent sense of commitment/responsibility towards public:

In this section I examine how producers have responded to the questions of whether media organisations are similar to the institutions/mediated public sphere, and whether producers can relate to a commitment towards social awareness (in case of this project, it is gender-based awareness) or not. In this

case too, there is a clear divide in the perspective between those who are on the creative side of production and those who are on the marketing side. Enver Sajjad, who is the Content Head of scripts in Geo Channel, explains the situation this way:

ES 00:39: I am trying to treat media as an institution, but it is a commercial medium, we run after consumers....ES24:10: Those who have stakes in this medium have only one commitment towards making money, this is another way of exploitation in a capitalist society rather, I should say, capitalism-oriented society.

It is noticed that for people working on the creative side of Geo, it is difficult to come to terms with the fact that the Geo Entertainment Channel is working as a commercial organisation. This channel has been active in creating a space somewhat closer to an ideal of the public sphere on its news channels. Under the different campaigns on education and women rights (*Zara Sochyay*), the channel has created a perception of an institution or at least an effective pillar of the state. Imran Aslam, the President of Geo Channel also endorses these claims by stressing that Geo has never received any subsidy for any of its awareness campaigns. However, there is a clear division of opinion on this. Dr Liaquat (ex-vice President of Geo Channel) shares his viewpoint on the funding of the *Zara Sochyay* campaign:

AL 1:01:01: Before moving the 'Women Protection Bill', there was a campaign launch on GEO under the title of '*Zara Sochyay*', to facilitate the process in the parliament and to build a consensus among the citizens. Though we needed amendment in the clause to clearly distinguish between the rape and adultery, the debates remained controversial. I would also like to add that it was launched

on GEO, but there is a possibility that the government might have funded this campaign to build consensus among the people.

This is an interesting case, where private channels are actively engaging in facilitating policy amendment, yet it reinforces the idea that it is out of a commercial motive. This issue in particular offers another line of inquiry. It may be healthy for a democracy to have a mediated public sphere where members of the public deliberate on a particular issue, but it raises questions about the broadcasters' ethical and normative commitments (also its editorial policy). Recently (post-May, 2014), Geo is accused of seeking funding from other countries to further their agendas on screen. (Muhammad, 2014)⁸¹ The license of Geo TV has also been suspended on these accounts. However, the Business Unit Head reads Geo's position/role in the industry as:

BI 11:00: We are a commercial television network. We are Geo and not NGO. Geo is not a media institution and our objective is commercial. Our viewer is our consumer, and we look after our client as well as our consumer.

Badar Ikram, and the President of the Geo Network, also argue that their channel is not a non-governmental organisation; however, they admit that the expectations attached to it are such that it is hard to convince people that it is a commercial organisation. This perception is due to the fact that Geo Network is another chapter of the Jang Group, which is the oldest and most established

⁸¹ Muhammad, P. (2014) 'Foreign Funding Geo Jang Group defaulter of billions of rupees', *The Express Tribune*, May 18, Available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/709896/foreign-funding-geojang-group-defaulter-of-billions-of-rupees-claims-imran/> (Accessed: 24 August, 2014)

group of national daily in Pakistan with a maximum reach for any newspaper in the country. In a similar way, Todd Gitlin discovers that Arnold Becker, CBS's vice-president for television research, argues that 'I am not interested in culture. I am not interested in pro-social values. I have only one interest. That's whether people watch the program.' (1985: 31). What comes across as if, there is simply no normative conception (to use Baker and Hesmondhalgh's term, 2011) towards programming.

Similarly, ARY Network is the first private channel to offer the alternative space for expression in Pakistani television culture, and has delivered in many ways during the tough times, such as natural disasters. However, it is noted that even those who are serving on the higher levels in this organisation have no qualms about stressing the actual profit-making motive of their channels. The President of Sales and Marketing in the ARY Channel maintained that his channel is a commercial organisation that has to exact returns for the investors/sponsor but at the same time asserting that:

FT 01:46: Private companies are independent bodies where investors want returns...04:17: We have tried that we maintain social value but we do have a commercial motive too....FT 51:50: I don't think media is the pillar of state and why should it be treated like one for realities on ground are quite different.

Tamanna insists during the discussion that it is an academic concept or category that media serves to be the pillar of the state; the organisations have their own motives at hand. In the Pakistani context, the private broadcasters with news channels have been assertive about the necessity of freedom of speech on television. They have even protested on different occasions to stress the fact that

private channels offer the democratic space to the public out there. However, on a closer analysis of the interview transcripts of those on the production side, it seems that voicing such concerns can be another way of exercising the freedom to seek as many consumers and sponsors as possible. Specifically in relation to the gender-based based content, Ali Moin explains in a manner that is meant to warn me about taking these initiatives in a positive light.

AM 40:00: Writing on *halala* and incest or any such sensitive topic has nothing more to it than writing for commercial purposes. Don't take it in any other sense related to social commitment.

By stressing that it has nothing more to it, Ali Moin is trying to stress that there is simply no gender-based agenda to bring such issues on television for the purpose of initiating any debate; rather, it is taken up to hook viewers. Babar Javed who has been directly involved in producing drama serials and also refers to his production house as a factory revealed that:

BJ 17:10: There is simply no agenda or commitment, it is all unconscious effort to produce on social issues, and I am producing for money and also to seek appreciation of the viewers. Both are equally important.

All the case-studies for this project that invite attention for highlighting highly gendered content and that show impulses for initiating debates on sensitive issues such as child rape and exploitation of women in the name of religion and culture appear to have been produced for the market alone. Javed mentions he has no commitment to any cause at all, rather he usually produces on the popular beats. At the same time, one can also notice that he wants appreciation of the

viewers and that it is not just about ratings. Syed Ali Raza, who is another famous director communicates his general understanding among the creative people in this light:

SAR 38:48: It is a situation of mayhem, where producers do not have any agenda, they are not producing such stuff consciously, and they are trapped in a vicious cycle of catering to certain demands/mind-set. I may disagree with certain type of content on the state channel for it is politicised, but at least PTV has an agenda and a purpose to it, producers in PTV know what they are talking about and are committed to certain kind of programming for the viewers. The private sector lacks that vision, they do not know what they are doing and are purposelessly producing what they are producing and very soon they will soon hit an iceberg.

Apparently, Raza creates a picture of simply 'no method' to production. He raises a crucial point here where he describes the lack of vision among the producers. But one can simply not call it lack of vision, in fact there is a direction. All the stakeholders in the industry are heading in the same direction of producing for revenue. Comparing it with the state television makes the task of understanding the dynamics of the private sector easier. There is no obvious social agenda in production of any sort or kind, whether gender-based or not; however, it is working in a direction to produce a space that is in some ways discursive (talk shows) and it opens up discourses on the gender-based issues (in drama serials).

5.7: Conclusion

This chapter finds that the television industry in Pakistan is similar to the media industries discussed by Todd Gitlin (1985) and Baker and Hesmondhalgh (2011). The commercial imperatives involved in production are greater than producers' own grounding in ethics and their social commitment. The commercial market, organized on the basis of advertising revenue engenders particular constraints. The creative workers lack creative autonomy in their work, which cannot be equated to the lack of creative rationale. They feel alienated (to use Marxist term) from their own labour, specifically in the case of breakfast shows where hosts have to reproduce tailor-made content for a defined set of consumers. These workers lack job security, depend on and are anxious about ratings. At the same time, these workers crave for a public and citizens who would engage with their content.

The sales and marketing side appears to be more powerful than the creative side of production. The executives in the industry take the final call, but there is no clear editorial policy in such media institutions. Nevertheless, I argue that the sample audience (used in ratings) cannot be abstracted from the society: these members also reflect the issues of a wider public. For example, if tragedy and women oriented themes sell, it is due to the fact that these themes directly speak to the status of women in Pakistani society. No matter how constrained and anaemic it may appear, the Pakistani television landscape creates occasional public spheres that not only engage the sample audience but also other members of the public.

Bearing these ideas in mind the next chapter will explore how producers do tend to produce emancipatory content within a television industry that is so ratings' driven.

Chapter 6

Empowering women through gendered content: Producers' perspective

The introduction of this thesis has suggested that gender-related content of Pakistani television has the potential for altering the public/private distinction in Pakistani society that may lead to engaging female citizens in the public sphere and empowering them in some ways. Critically examining the gendered content has made it evident in this study that the content in question, at times renegotiates the existing binary of the public and the private in Pakistani context but at the same time reinforces it; it gives exposure to marginalised groups and offers spaces for expression, but it also channelises the discourse into a particular direction. Chapter 5 has argued that gender-based content is produced for the demand of the market but there is also a possibility that the demand of the market and the commitment of the producers to highlight gender-based issues coincide on some occasions. That gives rise to a possibility that there can be an implied intention to bring some change in the attitudes of the viewers towards gender-based issues. I will be looking at whether content that appears to be emancipatory is driven by an underlying agenda to achieve certain ends (in relation to change) at the producers' end or not. This chapter will look at how the producers of the talk shows hold different opinions on engagement and empowerment as compared to the producers working in the genre of drama serials. However, Chapter 7 will also address the same issues in relation to viewers' perspective.

The gender-based empowerment through television has several dimensions to it. In this line of inquiry, the set of questions I will be dealing with in this chapter are:

- What exactly constitutes gender-based empowerment or emancipation in Pakistani television culture?
- Is there a conscious effort or an implied intention on the part of the producers to empower viewers or to bring change in relation to gender issues in the society?

In this way, the chapter will explore whether it is just the beginning of some sort of conversation, which may develop into a full scale public debate and even lead to deliberation of policies vis a vis gender in years to come or not.

The content in question is broadly divided into two categories: the narrative form and the interactive genre. The narrative form includes the drama serials and the reenactment of crime stories while the interactive genre includes three kinds of shows: religion/social issues-based talk shows, breakfast shows and crime shows. In the section that follows, I aim to analyse 'what producers/writers/hosts think about this content that particularly deals with the representation of women in drama serials and what it holds for change/empowering women.⁸²

6.1: Drama serials: Empowering viewers?

From the qualitative textual analysis of the gender-based content, the study has picked the themes in drama serials that fall into my definition of gender-based

⁸² Please note that this chapter will only feature discussion generated from the creative side of production, with the exception of two respondents.

content. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, the 'change' in the gender-based content emerged after the liberalisation policy in 2002. Based on the themes such as those of child rape, honour killings, subjugation of women in the joint system, rights of women for divorce, this section addresses the question of whether drama serials can be useful in empowering women or bringing change in relation to gender or not. In other words, I ask whether any of these themes can change the fabric of this society or not. For this genre, I have interviewed 18 people in total that includes **four** content heads in different channels, **seven** writers, and **nine** directors/producers of drama serials⁸³. This section is further divided into three sections; the first section analyses how content heads comment on the content of drama serials in relation to the question of change or empowering viewers; the second section looks at how directors and producers evaluate the potential of drama serials; and the third section examines how writers discuss this genre's potential in relation to bringing change.

6.1.1: Content Heads' perspective on potential of drama serials in bringing change:

The section begins with the responses of the content heads that oversee the selection of scripts in different channels. Consider, for example, how content heads of four different channels discuss the 'element/potential of change' in scripts:

Ali Imran /AI (Content Head, ARY) 21:20⁸⁴: I think, these days, scripts focus on home and relationships within home, and as Content Head, I have an issue with this. As such home and what goes within home cannot be removed from

⁸³ In Pakistani industry, directors are also working as producers in many cases.

⁸⁴ For the sake of accuracy, I use initials as well as minute and second format extracted from audio transcripts.

what goes on within the society. These days when you watch our narratives, as a viewer you may not be able to tell which 'era' is this, which political party is in power. It is true that personal is political, but what makes it political is also important, therefore, other factors, day to day politics, environment and the socio-political turmoil in the society are also crucial in making it political. We, as a broadcasting channel, are only aiming to entertain, but unknowingly and in a subtle manner, women are getting empowered in the process. The genre of 'drama serial' is both about commodification of women as well as emancipation, but I don't see any point in constantly raising the issue of emancipation and not doing any further on it. We are producing content that highlights the misery of women in a patriarchal society, but women who face such misery in real lives are not watching our drama serials. In recent days, I can recall *Roag*, as one such project that has disturbed viewers, and after this project, morning shows also addressed the issue of child rape.

Imran mentions that narratives reflect an obsession with the power struggle within the home and relationships within it, but the writers/directors usually fail to make it a society's issue, and rather treat the subject as 'one person's story'. Imran emphasises the importance of looking at these issues in a wider perspective by trying to relate the gender-based issues to the issues of poverty, social and political turmoil in the society. Moreover, he also points towards another interesting aspect of the commercial industry where at times the broadcasters' agenda can offer moments for emancipation within the popular culture. It clarifies how popular culture can become a site for furthering capitalistic agenda (profit-making) but also a site for engaging with serious issues. In this regard, Imran refers to one of the projects (*Roag*) that has been exceptional in terms of its treatment of the subject of child rape. The story revolves around a girl child who is raped in a 'public place' and not home,

which adds social value to the serial. Not only those who are involved in production of drama serials but also the viewers who are interviewed for this study can recall this particular serial as a story that has disturbed them or even made them more cautious.⁸⁵

Enver Sajjad, Head of scripts in Geo TV responds to the same question on the potential of drama serial in bringing change in this manner:

ES 19:17: About change, I would say that those who want to bring some change do not watch television, for there is nothing on television for them, and those who watch it, forget it very soon and cannot bring any change.

Sajjad notes that those who are watching cannot bring the difference in society or so it is believed. This brings us back to the issue of who is watching. It reinforces the perception of the producers (as addressed in Chapter 5) that those who are watching are passive housewives. Moreover, he also draws attention to the fact that in Pakistan those who raise their voice for change and empowering women are the liberal feminist activists who come from the upper middle class and do not watch television, while those who follow Islamic feminism are not so keen on television. (See for example, Zia, 2009). This relates to the idea that popular culture does not cater to the intellectual class; rather it caters to a class that does not critically engage with the issues.

Similarly, those who have authority and the power to change things are not so keen on drama serials, which also includes male members of the family.

Another important angle in this regard is that most of those who are exploited within the home do not have access to television or if they do have the access, the lounge as a place for viewing does not offer the luxury to watch anything

⁸⁵ I will come back to this serial and others in a separate section where I discuss the projects that have made impact.

controversial as noted in Chapter 4. In our conversation on drama serials and change, Ali Moin, Content Head in Express Entertainment analyses the issue of change like this:

AM 01:00:04: If I were to speak about change, I think we have in a way made urban viewer (woman) more intolerant, empowered and more aware of her rights too, but we are not reaching out to rural viewers.

For Ali Moin, drama serial has some potential to empower women but he also relates to a crucial point that gender disparities are far greater in rural areas and commercial television is still not easily accessible to the rural viewers. In his opinion, the content needs to address the actual victims or those who are facing discrimination.

Maimoona Siddiqui, Content Head of Entertainment, Hum TV notes:

MS 09:43: Let's be honest to entertain the viewers. As a social citizen, we (at Hum TV) want to give some message too. But, if I say, through drama serial, I am aiming to change some ground realities, NO.

These responses have raised several important issues in relation to the role of drama serials in bringing change. First, there is no 'underlying motivation' to empower women through drama serials; yet the fact that producers cannot be abstracted from the society and as media professionals there is still an implicit intention to give some message too. Overall, the content heads raise four issues in relation to change, first; that gender-based issues should be addressed in a wider perspective. The writers should look for the socio political reasons behind such issues. The second issue raised is that those who bring change are

supposedly not watching. The third issue raised is that in order to bring some change, the producers need to address viewers in the rural areas. Something that is quite evident in the discussion above is that the content heads acknowledge the inadequacies in the scripts, but do not doubt the potential of the drama serials in bringing change.

6.1.2: Directors/producers perspective on drama serials in bringing change⁸⁶:

Moving on, I will now demonstrate how three leading directors in the industry address the question of whether drama serials can bring some change or empower women in any way or not. I begin this section with Babar Javed, the director and producer of several award winning drama serials, such as *Roag* and *Meri Zaat Zarra-e-Benishan*. Javed is also one of the owners of mega-production houses (A n B Productions) for drama serials in Pakistan. His project *Meri Zaat Zara-e-Baynishan*, received awards in several categories, and interestingly in almost all of the focus groups the female viewers mention how much they like the portrayal of the protagonist who is the victim of a wrongly practised tradition of swearing by the Holy Book (over a dispute between mother-in-law and daughter in law) and is ultimately divorced and thrown out of her family home.

Most of his projects are similar in terms of content in which sacrifice is glorified as a prime virtue of the protagonist. Therefore, I ask`why the portrayals of protagonists in his serials are not inspiring enough to take issue

⁸⁶ It is important to note that in the state channels, directors are also referred to as producers. In the private channels, there is still no strict separation between the directors and the producers. Outside channels, there are directors who have now become producers.

with the exploitative practices in Pakistani society and what it holds in terms of empowering viewers'. Referring to his projects, he replies in this manner:

BJ 33:00: I agree, a lot of the representation of women is about reinforcing the status quo. For instance, in *Meri Zaat, Maaye Ni* (O' Mother) and *Mera Saaein*, the protagonists had to conform to the social customs. And when you criticise, saying that I have not shown a situation of 'bail out', I would say that in our society, there is no escape from these norms, it is our reality, and honestly, we don't even think in those terms of 'how our viewers would take it'. It is the job of the channels to conduct focus groups on such things and tell us that they need something on these lines, but I try to engage women with issues of social value. I read this crime story in print about a man who murdered his own children because his *peer* (saint) had asked him to do that. I will be using this news story in *Sabz Pari Laal Kabooter* (Green fairy red pigeon). See, you have to understand that people who can make the actual difference in policies are not the ones who are watching our drama serials. But I do see this potential in drama serials to engage people, so if any government collaborates with us with an agenda, then, maybe we can empower women.

Javed raises some very critical issues: firstly, he acknowledges that as the head of the production house, his work is limited to provide drama serials (as products) to the broadcasting channels and whether viewers approve of the content or not is the job of the broadcasters to assess. In this way, production homes work as factories and the ethical dimensions involved in the content are to be assessed by the content heads who work in the channels. There is a censor board in every channel; likewise there is a Research Department that conducts focus groups for the viewers to assess the viewing tastes of the audiences. It can also be noticed that Javed highlights realistic stories in his drama serials and the

reality in Pakistan is dark for women where there is no situation for the bail out. Despite the stress on highlighting the realities on ground, he also acknowledges the potential in this genre for bringing change; however, he stresses that any such effort needs collaboration with the government. Interestingly, there is simply no established rule about the genre and the content that can engage with issues of serious nature. It can depend upon a lot of factors, the cast, the treatment of the subject, willingness on the part of the producers but above all, it depends upon the audiences. At times, producers may intend to engage viewers with an issue of social nature, while on other occasions, producers may produce only for commercial reasons yet viewers may engage. The case in point is *Roag* (Sorrow) a story about a girl child who is raped in her neighbourhood. This serial was produced and directed by Baber Javed. At the time of the fieldwork, this serial had become the talk of the town for the nature of its content. The story highlights the ordeal of a young girl who is raped and the issues faced by the family in re-assimilation of this victim. Having been recommended by the producers (especially, Ali Imran) in the industry as well as assessing its popularity in my viewing sample, I ask Baber Javed about his motivations involved in taking up the script:

BJ 06:45: I made *Roag*, and it was so depressing to watch, but at the same time eye opening that even I started to have this conversation at home with my wife about not sending children to school with our driver.... But to be honest, I wasn't too sure about the impact it would have...

For Javed, *Roag* was like any other project, he never assumed that this project would trigger many post viewing discussions on television and among the viewers. What is usually ignored while producing, is the role of the content. In case of *Roag*, the treatment of the subject is similar to that of preaching

whereby characters delivered 'elaborate' dialogues about 'how to assimilate the rape victims into the society' or 'how not to send young girls to a local shop'. Any such project that has to do with social reform or engaging the public with any cause also demands a deliberate effort on the part of the producers, though *Roag* could be an exception. It is also worth noting that after *Roag* went on air, several morning shows took up the issue of rape of minors as their topic. Whether there was a direct link between the airing of *Roag* as pioneer in breaking the silence on this issue or if it was coincidental that other genres also started conversations on this topic could not be verified. In relation to empowerment, it could be argued that there were still limitations to the narrative: the victim was not shown fighting back for assimilation in the society, rather opting for seclusion. Thus, the narrative could be given its due for breaking the silence on such issues, but it does so by calling for further disciplining and restricting women's access to the public space. How viewers' engagement with this serial translated into what might be described as a paranoia and fear for the outside world will be explored in Chapter 7.

Ayub Khawar, who has been a director/producer with PTV for 25 years, and has been working with Geo TV for five years, also asserts that this genre has some limitations in terms of change, for neither the producers have any such intention nor the genre engages its viewers to this level.

AK 47:11: I have been producing/directing for 30 years, I can say it for sure, drama serial can never be an agent of change. ...51:10: No, with such content about gender and sexuality, producers have simply no intention of bringing change in society. All that producers want to do is to 'hook' viewers with shocking themes that they may not have heard about before. ..1:02:50: *Halala* is

yet another formula that has clicked with the viewers and producers are only following the trend, they are simply unable to touch the issue itself.

Like Khawar, all those who have worked with the state channel resent the fact that producers in the private sector lack a sense of duty towards society, and incorporating subjects on gender and sexuality is merely an effort to hook the audience rather than touching the essence of the subject. Here, Khawar is referring to those who own production houses and also broadcasting channels.

Despite the criticism on the treatment of *halala* or other gender-based issues, Javed does not see drama serial as a genre that is entirely ineffective in bringing a change in relation to gender-based issues. Khawar, on the other hand doubts the potential of this space.

6.1.2a: The case of special projects:

In a commercial industry that chases consumers, Geo channel runs a Special Project Department (SP 1) for drama serials. The SP1 division is committed towards raising awareness on social issues, but more importantly gender-based issues. With projects like *Bol Meri Machli* (Speak, my fish) *Tum Ho Kay Chup* (And, you are silent), the Head of Production works with an intention to engage the viewers with the issues.⁸⁷ *Tum Ho Kay Chup* is a serial produced under the Special Project Department of Geo Channel that aims to empower women through its productions.

IA 20:30: The projects that fall under my department are called Special Projects that aim towards empowering women, and my sponsor for these drama serials is our channel GEO, so neither ratings nor the sales department bother me at all.

⁸⁷ Iqbal Ansari, Head of SP1 on record for this.

When Iqbal Ansari spoke as Head of Special Projects, about 'ratings not bothering him at all', he was referring to Geo's policy of having at least 'one drama serial' at a time that aims to engage viewers with gender-based issues regardless of its potential to give ratings or profit. These projects were written by Asghar Nadeem Syed. With *Bol Meri Machli*, the writer attempted to touch upon the issue of homosexuality as well as extra marital affairs, and with *Tum Ho Kay Chup*, he tried to bring to screen a real case of a Baluchi tribe, in which five women were buried alive in the name of honour, as per the customs of this tribe. Even the Minister who represented this particular constituency did not intervene to stop this crime.⁸⁸ In terms of ratings, the projects may not have delivered but they were motivating enough for the viewers to protest against the narratives. *Tum Ho Kay Chup* offended Baluchis to the extent that a few of them formed a webpage in protest of such a representation of Baluchis,⁸⁹ while viewers of *Bol Meri Machli* got so involved with the story that young university girls protested against one of the actors who portrayed the 'character of a poet who sexually abuses women'.⁹⁰ For this particular serial, the viewers reacted not only to the portrayal but also towards the openness of the content. However, I would argue that the project produced under the Department of Special Projects, was far from inspirational, and rather based on reality. Since, these projects were aimed to engage viewers with realities on ground, they were at some level able to touch the audience in the way intended. For these projects in

⁸⁸ Felix, Q. (2008) Baluchistan, five girls buried alive for honor crimes, AsiaNews.it, 9 January, Available at: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Balochistan,-five-girls-buried-alive-for-honor-crimes-13114.html> (Accessed July 5, 2014)

⁸⁹ See for example, Ban Geo Drama Tum Ho Kay Chup, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ban-GEO-drama-TUM-HO-KAY-CHUP/240885039280421> (Accessed August 22, 2014)

⁹⁰ Pakistani actor Shahood Alvi Narrowly Survives From Gilrs Attack (2013), *Awami Web* (April 4), Available at: <http://www.awamiweb.com/pakistani-actor-shahood-alvi-narrowly-survives-from-girls-attack-64630.html> (Accessed: August 4, 2014)

particular, there was a deliberate attempt to disturb the viewers in a certain way, and the actions taken on part of the viewers also show that they took an issue with execution of the narratives.

6.1.3: Writers' motivation for writing on gender-based content and whether drama serials can bring some change:

Drama serials in particular, and television in general are considered to be a writers' medium in the Pakistani television industry. Therefore, when I interviewed writers, I requested them to speak on their vision behind highlighting certain gender-based subjects and also to comment on themes in general, in this genre. I will begin with Hasina Moin, who is one of the most senior writers in the industry. She has bagged acclaims for her portrayal of confident women in drama serials on state television (See for example, Kothari, 2005 and Suleman, 1999). The protagonists in her drama serials were appreciated for their unwavering confidence but at the same time were criticised for representing a class alien to many Pakistani households. With *Aahat*, a project funded by John Hopkins University that aired on state television in 1994, she contributed a script on family planning. At the time, *Aahat* drew criticism for being too open in its treatment of a subject that is supposed to be a private matter in Pakistani society.⁹¹ In this interview, Moin mentions that her protagonists were shown to be secure in themselves and loved by men in their families because she took inspiration from her own life. More importantly, she argues that this is how women should be loved and given confidence to achieve their dreams. In other words, it was important for her to set standards through which the agency of women can be structured.

⁹¹ Ali Rizvi, Hasina Moin as well as Kazim Pasha on record for this information.

To her, the drama serial in the post-liberalisation period, does not entertain the viewers; it is rather regressive in terms of impact. According to her, liberalisation in terms of gendered content in television culture has not facilitated the change in attitudes towards gender related issues in the society. For example, in our conversation on drama serials, she expresses her reservation on the treatment of gender-related issues in such a way:

HM 10:45: Showing incest, *halala* and marriage to Quran⁹² is not with a view to address the issue on ground but to create a spectacle or a thriller out of it.

HM 43:00: With the extra coverage that we are giving to homosexuality and transsexuality, we are actually encouraging them to come out openly, and no wonder that we now have a lot of them on traffic signals (as beggars). Is this what we call assimilation?

In her criticism about glorifying 'transsexuality', she has in a way, implied a direct link between the narratives of drama serials and its impact on society. According to her, 'transgender/transsexual community has sought this confidence through exposure on screen to come out openly and flock to the streets.' To her, these issues are not representing the majority of households in Pakistan, and therefore, giving too much exposure to gender-related issues can only make it a norm for this society and not empower gender in any way. She even mentions that while writing, her intention was to bring forward the

⁹² A practice called *Haq Bakhshish*, a practice through girls are married to Quran. Under this practice, girls are given in service to religion for life. They are barred from marrying outside their family and this is purely done to secure their share in the family property. This is a cultural practice and in clash with *Shariah*.

See for example, Pakistan Haq Bakhshish, No Right To Wed (2007), *IRIN Asia*, March 8, Available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/70564/pakistan-haq-bakhshish-no-right-to-wed>, (Accessed 23 July, 2014)

representations of 'men who know how to love than to oppress' and also that through her representation of female characters, her viewers could learn to protect themselves. These concerns on her part raise some important questions in relation to what sort of content can bring about change in society. For Hasina Moin, the reality around her compelled her to write stories of women who were confident but morally upright and were loved as well as protected by their families.

However, for Fasih Bari, reality has another dimension to it. Known for his controversial scripts, he refuses to conform to the writing trends that seek to reinforce the gender-based practices through this genre. Since 2011, Bari's serials are becoming popular in terms of ratings. He is one of the few writers who has taken issue with the representation of women as subservient to men, but in a somewhat different manner. Unlike Hasina's protagonists, Bari's scripts highlight characters that do not fall into the category of perfect human beings, and are mostly represented as individuals with shortcomings as anyone in real life. He focusses on the issues that surround the lives of people in the lower middle class; however, it will not be wrong to say that his narratives do reflect an obsession with whatever happens within the private sphere and mostly focus upon issues of sexuality in Pakistani society. For instance, he has highlighted the life of sexual exceptionals in Pakistani society, issues of incest and adultery and especially, how women in our society get away with many things in the name of sexuality.⁹³ His treatment of such issues is controversial in a way that he does not create an evil out of those who err in relationships, and also takes issue with the 'Shariah compliant version of morality' in the society; nor does he create fantasies, rather sticks to what is happening in the society,

⁹³ Ahmed, N. F. (2014) 'First person the world according to Bari', *Dawn* 18 May [Online] Available at: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1106520> (Accessed 28 August, 2014)

but when I asked him whether he is aiming to 'bring some change or open up society on debates around gender and sexuality', he replies:

FB 49:38: I think TV will remain inactive in bringing change in society. If we are aiming for some change through television, we have to be very patient for that, and even channels have to experiment with emancipatory themes for a long time. However, I do think that we have had enough hide and seek with issues of sexuality.

Despite an implied intention to break silence on issues of sexuality, Bari draws attention to an important aspect that it has only been a few years that media have liberalised and it can take a long time before television can catalyse a change.

Invariably, all those involved in the production of drama serials, raise similar responses to the question about the potential of drama serials in changing and empowering women in some ways. But there is also a contradiction within their answers. On the one hand, writers as well as directors/producers point towards the fact that the drama serial does not have the potential to engage women to the point that it can change their approach towards gender based issues. On the other hand, there is a concern that production houses and the broadcasters do not offer inspirational roles in the narratives. In these discussions, writers who are experimenting with emancipatory themes are critical of the popular narratives that glorify powerless women within their homes. Voicing such contradictions, Fasih Bari pointed out that representations that may otherwise appear to be liberal are inherently regressive:

FB 20:10: Our narratives tend to show that women who are ambitious, lack in moral values, or women who step out of their homes to seek goals end up taking shortcuts.

Every other drama serial is based on relationships within the home, mainly on how to win over a husband or in-laws. The popular representation, in this regard, is that of a protagonist who is submissive and almost selfless in all relationships that define her. The emancipatory moments are defined in 'closures' where protagonists are also glorified in their positions as ideal homemakers who are eventually acknowledged for righteousness and sacrifices by others. Women in such narratives do not have a definition of their own identity, rather the self is glorified in relation to how well they submit to the system/culture and relationships around them. In such a context, it is obviously hard to find a female character as a 'thinking self' or an individual who has distinctive characteristics, some ambitions and can take her own decisions. What makes it more intriguing, is the acceptability of such representations as an attempt to emancipate women within home which can be translated into disciplining women in another way. A virtuous woman is the one who is powerless and does not raise a voice against the malpractices of the society; usually silence and enduring pain are shown as her true strengths. The idea at play here is that women can be emancipated when they reclaim their positions in religiously mandated roles. Therefore, in this line of inquiry, I also engaged in conversations with writers whose work is not only highly gendered but also popular in terms of ratings, and that which complies with religiously mandated roles.

Umera Ahmed is one of the female digest writers who has in recent years, taken to the small screen with her 'screen plays' which have become highly popular/rated among the viewers. In our telephonic conversation on gender-based themes and changing realities for women on ground, Ahmed opines that:

UA 06:15: I don't see 'women's emancipation as an issue really, this idea is foreign to us... typical liberal mindsets are imposing such ideas as issues.'

For Ahmed, the idea of emancipation has not originated locally. In fact, in response to my question about her motivation behind creating protagonists who suffer at the hands of the discriminatory practices at home, such as in *Meri Zaat Zarra e Baynishaan* and *Maat*, she mentions:

UA 56:00: Creating false hopes is dangerous but I never intended to glorify misery, I was rather taking an issue with wrong doings/practices of antagonists in the play.

Throughout the conversation, Ahmed reiterates that 'religion is frame of reference for addressing any issue (01:00:1:00) and my idea of women rights' has never stepped outside the boundaries laid by religion'. (01:00:1:16) ... and I wonder why do we raise this voice about women's rights and not about women's duties? (01:00:1:47) She goes on to argue that Pakistan is facing many challenges locally (referring to *Talibanisation*) and an immense pressure from outside world to address women issues. In this regard, she believes that Islam

has already offered rights and protection to women in *Shariah*, she refers to how her project *Kankar* is purely based on the right of women for divorce.⁹⁴

In a somewhat different approach to her writings, her serial *Shehr-e-Zaat* (on air at the time of the interview), focusses on how wives unconditionally seek the love of their husbands rather than seeking that of God. In an attempt to question women's role as believing Muslims, she follows the path of Islamic feminism, whereby women are rescued from their roles as typical housewives and as subservient to sovereigns in home, to women who are committed and accountable to God first, then their male custodians. Though religion and patriarchy complement each other, this ideological shift from culture to religion promises certain comfort zones for women, as servants to God first, and then to any male member of their family. Since religion does not offer a single interpretation in relation to 'rights and dos and don'ts for women', it is certainly a better alternative for women who are eager to move on.

Despite Ahmed's modest admission that writers of female digests have limited exposure to worldly issues, she has been eloquent on the repercussions of political turmoil that Pakistan is presently facing, and how it has affected the scripts in certain ways. She argues that in the recent years, religion has become a commodity and violence has become the language for expression in Pakistan, and gender offers that ground/plain where violence is easily expressed. However, when I ask her about whether drama serials can bring some change or not, her statements were contradictory. On the one hand, Ahmed explains how women in recent years, have stepped out of their homes for work in small cities which in itself speaks for change, and how they pick up latest trends in

⁹⁴ This serial raises the issue of respect for wives in a marriage. She has attempted to clear much known controversy around the right of a husband to beat wife in the light Islam.

fashion through television; on the other hand, she insists that drama serial can only offer entertainment.

Like many other writers, Kifayat Rudini also claims to be showing the actual face of the society in his scripts. In *Kaash*, (on air at the time of the fieldwork) Rudini highlights the issue of 'selling daughters into contractual marriages' by the family members and also domestic abuse of women within the households, irrespective of their class. Rudini discusses how important it is to raise themes based on reality, which can possibly motivate viewers to rethink the practices within society. Rudini mentions that he has also raised a practice about women bringing *kafn* (cloth to wrap a dead body) in dowry. The cloth symbolises that a woman shall never think of divorce or leaving her husband under any circumstances. During the interview, Rudini shares that he has seen these practices in his own culture.⁹⁵ However, those who highlight the dark truths of society think that speaking to/about realities on ground can make viewers think about the practices around them. As Rudini argues:

KR 28: 20: I strongly believe that we must show reality, it is our mirror. If you don't want to see your ugly face in the mirror, then break it or continue doing whatever you are, but it is the responsibility of the writer to show you your real face, which is mine as well, for I am an insider to it too.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ It was interesting to note that most of the respondents in my viewers' sample (irrespective of their class) wanted me to take Rudini's interview for they were uncomfortable with issues raised as well as the treatment of the subject within his serial.

⁹⁶ Educated in a religious seminary for over eight years, Rudini never attended a formal school. He escaped from his religious seminary twice and came to Karachi for work. He comes from the province of Baluchistan and writes on the practices he has seen in the rural areas of Pakistan. His serial *Mi Raqsam* is also based on a real story about a *Mullah* who has four wives, one of whom is sentenced for stoning.

KR 29:15: In literature/short stories, we usually have a realistic wind-up but we (writers) do give reasons for happy/unhappy endings. We cannot create utopia, we have to create hope, even a tragic wind-up can give hope to viewers, and that hope lies in the lesson they learn from drama serials. This is not a medium for films, where you can create fantasy; we base our themes on realistic footings. I want my viewers to watch my drama serials/soaps and later engage in a post-viewing discussion. I am happy to know that the viewers have motivated you to interview me, for my work disturbed them, which shows they are thinking about it.

Similar to what Umera Ahmed has argued in relation to her position regarding realism in drama serials, Rudini also asserts the importance of showing reality. In fact, he links it to the ethical dimension in writing that writers should mirror the realities and that may lead to taking steps towards change. Rudini also invites attention to the fact that television and films are different mediums where television is used as a medium based on realism, while films is used for fantasies.⁹⁷ In Rudini's account, one can also notice that as a writer he wants to engage the viewers and, is passionate about what he writes. Although he works in a commercial industry and at times writes on the given one-liners,⁹⁸ yet he has his own vision and an agenda of his own.

Khalid Ahmed identifies issues with popular scripts like those of Rudini and Umera Ahmed. Khalid Ahmed tries to bring on screen characters that defy norms and give voice to what falls under 'different/exceptional or other'. In our conversation about narratives on screen and empowerment, he not only

⁹⁷ In Pakistani television, there are very few genres that allow fantasy-oriented scripts, such as telefilms.

⁹⁸ An assigned topic by the broadcaster or the production house.

criticises the stereotypical representations as 'opium art' but also raises an important issue about the mindset of writers who are popular with their scripts:

KA 11:03: I don't think showing oppressed women is an art of high quality, in fact I would call it 'opium art'. Within that oppression, you need to create a conflict, that is, to stand against the oppression. I don't do it (opium art).

KA 26:44: It also depends upon the writer's own disposition. It is true that those who are writing are mostly female, but living in a patriarchal society, they are unable to write anything emancipatory.

Writers and producers, being part of the patriarchal society cannot be abstracted from their surroundings; therefore, whatever comes on screen is another reflection of the society. It is not only Khalid Ahmed who has an issue with such writers who glorify protagonists who sacrifice; Ali Moin and Fasih Bari, also have issues with the new breed of female writers who have almost colonised this genre. But there are occasional strikes by the writers who want to give oppositional representations. For Fasih Bari and Seema Ghazal (who has written over 300 scripts with usually popular themes), the core of the problem lies in compartmentalising individuals into 'gender'. For them, narratives as well as society's overall approach towards 'gender' is problematic in a way that it brackets an individual into a certain gender which automatically assigns him/her to a form of behaviour. To them, empowerment as a project is not helpful when we begin our discussion with an emphasis on a certain gender. It should rather be about all individuals who deserve to have equal rights. Fasih Bari Khan, Enver Sajjad and Seema Ghazal emphasise it in this manner:

ES 21:39: I completely disagree with the term 'feminism' and women's rights, why do you have to make this distinction. Creating hope can bring change and you should show the resolution in favour of humanity.

FB 26:45: Why do you have to distinguish between a man and a woman? I stress, that it should not really be this way, and I would never want a woman to be shown oppressed. I do not make this distinction. FB44:25: I think we should inform women about their rights and laws that protect them.

SG16:18: We have made woman into what she is now on screen and in the society, but someone has to remind us that before anything, she is just a human being and this is what we have to acknowledge her as first.

These three writers challenge the utility of the concept of gender and stress the importance of a gender-neutral approach that addresses human issues (only). This surely turns out to be a unique approach towards societal issues, especially in a society where issues related to gender demand urgent attention. Approaching such issues in Pakistani society without bias and the influence from religion and culture is still far from reality and in Pakistani television culture, empowering women or discussing gender-based issues does not allow women to have many routes to choose from.

Apparently, the trend of rising religiosity in Pakistan seems to have played a role in the content's obsession with home and glorifying it as a 'right' sphere of woman's activity. Since homes and relationships are the two main areas that define the gendered roles within Pakistani society, marriages and divorces remain one of the key themes in all such serials. Writers have been confident enough to reclaim the rights of women in the light of *Shariah*, and at times have taken an issue with it too. The concept of *halala* remains

controversial in relation to it; writers have highlighted how this practice is misused in the name of religion (in *Dil Hai Chota Sa* and *Jannat Say Nikali Hui Aurat*). Under *Shariah*, the husband has the right to divorce a wife while wife has to seek divorce through a court or *madrassa*, and it is such a tedious process that women prefer remaining within a wedlock rather than seeking divorce. In one of her recent plays, a writer⁹⁹ went as far as to challenge the law of divorce in Islam with a narrative whereby protagonist gives a divorce to her husband, in a verbal and a written form, which does not conform to *Shariah*. In replying to the question about why she believes her content is emancipatory, she mentions how she treats the subject of 'procedure of divorce' in Islam, in one of her recent plays.

18:30: In my recent serial, protagonist gave divorce to her husband in the last episode. Obviously, this does not conform to the Islamic tradition, but I kind of resisted the tradition and I wanted to make a point that if a woman does not want to live she can also walk out of the marriage with as much ease as a man can do. For the patriarchal society we live in, I don't even mention my 'intention/implicit meaning' to the Production Houses. (Anonymised)

One of the female writers who does not want to reveal her identity, discusses how marriage is highlighted as the only honourable arrangement for women to live in this society. To her understanding, it is now far from reality because the divorce rate is also increasing in the society. She therefore highlights in her narratives the possibility of contractual marriage/temporary marriage or *muta* has become an easy route for men in our society. She mentions how careful one has to be in approaching the subject of failures within traditional marriages, for

⁹⁹ This writer has requested to be anonymised. Therefore, I will not even give titles of her serials.

the pressure groups within society (dominant clergy) do not allow such possibilities for women in the name of religion. She even points out that the production houses are owned by men and they have no interest in themes that go down this path of raising questions about women's rights in society. Therefore, if she writes anything on these lines, she has to be very subtle about the subject.

06:18: Drama serials can change viewers' attitude towards certain things in society, but that change is not something that you might know of. In my serial, I have shown 'contractual marriage',...can't you see, it is already there in our society, youth does not want to get married, they want an escape out of traditional marriages, and you can now see that even Saudia Arabia is opening up to contractual marriages (referring to *misyar*). However, you can't approach certain topics such as contractual marriage (*muta*) or *halala* in an open manner because *mullah* (Islamic clergy) wouldn't let you do that. (Anonymised)

From the account above, one can see how this writer has pushed her own agenda. Interestingly, she also draws attention to how women writers or those writers who want to take issue with *Shariah* can utilise the space of drama serial in an indirect way. I have several observations in this regard that link my analysis back to the theoretical aspect of this debate. The industry that is highly commercialised and where content is supposedly determined by ratings, writers (as creative workers) continue to push their own agendas. The genre of drama serial in particular offers an unconstrained space (as I argued in Chapter 2), that can go against even the most influential pressure group (notably the clergy). In this way, popular culture becomes a site where 'political' is revisited (Dahlgren 2009). In this genre, society's traditional understanding on matters of divorce and marriage are contested. Extending it further, I would argue that

issues such as *muta* and a woman giving divorce to her husband can simply not be reviewed in a current affairs-based programme as acceptable acts. It is in the fictitious nature of this genre (drama serial) that its actual emancipatory potential lies. The entertainment value of the drama serial masks the sensitive nature of the issue but at the same time; it allows room for an in-depth analysis of problem (See for example, Klein 2013 for a similar discussion).

This section has also looked at the intentions/motivations of those at the producing end, in offering the gender-based narratives in drama serials. In this regard, the issues highlighted in this section raised several dimensions crucial in the production of gender-based serials. First, the project of empowerment is in most cases unintended. Second, the obsession with the 'home-oriented issues' has its roots in the dominant discourses (religion and patriarchy) in society. Third, the new breed of writers/directors highlighting such themes do not see inspirational 'characters' in the society, and are committed towards reflecting reality. No matter what the agenda of the commercial industry is, these writers are committed towards highlighting their version of reality or in other words, how they see gender-based issues. Fourth, almost all those involved in producing drama serials believe that this genre has a somewhat limited role in rapidly changing realities on ground. Fifth; the projects that aimed to disturb viewers in an intended way (SP1 Projects) were successful in doing so, but there is no single formula for addressing change; for few writers it is about acknowledging the reality first, while for others it is about creating inspirational roles that take issue with existing practices.

6.2: Breakfast shows: Empowering/bringing change on producers' agenda?

In this section about genre's potential in empowering/changing attitudes towards gender-based issues, I will now move on to the genre of breakfast shows. The breakfast shows offer an important slot in generating revenues for the channels. Only recently, breakfast shows have started a trend whereby real-life victims of gender-based crimes are given exposure on these formats. Usually, these victims approach such formats to seek protection or get in touch with NGOs or law enforcing agencies. These shows also highlight real-life cases in scripted form; where amateur artistes perform the role of the aggrieved parties to highlight their issues and then the host and viewers/at times in-studio audiences, also comment on this. Interestingly, these cases are mostly about the 'power struggle' within homes. However, I am primarily interested in the real-life victims and *not* the scripted ones. For this chapter, I will be looking at how producers/hosts of the breakfast shows comment on the potential to facilitate gender-based empowerment and whether producers display the intention/motivation to change realities on ground or not.

In the conversations with hosts of five 'highly rated' breakfast shows, I realised that anchors were clear about the fact that television has some limitations vis a vis creating a cause for debate around specific cases of abuse. In this section, I shall be raising the reasons considered responsible for making this genre a constraining space for such issues and ways in which they can offer somewhat limited support in relation to gender-based issues. I will begin this section with views of those hosts of breakfast shows who oppose the way other morning shows treat the sensitive issue of gender-based crimes. Sawaira Nadeem and Faisal Qureishi are committed towards raising civic sense. These

two anchors argue that breakfast shows can be used to discuss the possibility for wearing off the stigma attached to rape. They also bring forward that with so many cases reported every day about gender-based crimes, it would be more sensible to use such programmes for educating women on their rights under the state law. In our conversation on the potential of breakfast shows in raising awareness on gender-based issues and facilitating the gender-based policies, Sawaira Nadeem argues her stance in this manner:

SN 25:10: Does it have any social value? Of course, not, I don't see any point in showing specific cases, of somebody eloping or someone burnt, how would that affect anyone at all? 26:07: We can even facilitate policies, if we are making a cause for debate, then yes! But, not with just an hour-long verbal battle between the panelists on our show. If you have a big name as Fauzia Saeed (gender rights' activist), telling the viewers about any such bill, and letting them know their legal rights almost to the point of educating them...then, yes! And you have to elaborate to the point that you can tell your viewers how it affects you and how to participate to such discussions or contribute to the cause, in a certain way. Unfortunately, none of these shows do anything else than highlighting the issues, they make us all feel miserable, it is too depressing and I, as a viewer want to be motivated, inspired.

Faisal Qureishi who is vocal about his commitment to 'giving civic awareness to people' is another host who believes that bringing specific cases in shows, and discussing the ordeal of a particular victim cannot be helpful in furthering gender-based cause. He stresses:

FQ 37:09: I do get many cases of domestic abuse, but I do *not* want to create that drama, my motive is to give civic sense. My point is to empower women, and

give them a situation of bail out after such an accident rather than crying over what cannot be undone.

In the responses above, one can see that Sawaira Nadeem is sceptical of the treatment of such issues on breakfast shows. She and Qureshi imply that such cases are sensationalized by bringing victims to the shows. Further, Nadeem notes that giving out details on how the crime was carried out and how the victim and her family feel about it, can only make viewers feel helpless. In other words, Nadeem is inviting attention to how it can lead to more stereotyping or collective lamenting on the fate of rape victims. However, Nadeem acknowledges that such spaces can be used for counselling on women rights, that is, 'educating them'. Of course, educating viewers on their rights under a state law that protects them can further facilitate practices of cultural citizenship. This desire to know about their rights is also explored in Chapter 7.

Throughout this discussion, I get the sense that producers think that they are more knowledgeable and intellectually above their viewers. Deep down, there is also an understanding that viewers cannot handle something serious, because such content will be above them (for a similar discussion, see for example, Baker and Hesmondhalgh, 2011). See for example, what Sawaira Nadeem says in reply to my question about what do you think is the motivation behind trivialising the nature of such sensitive issues on these shows:

SN 38:50: Serious discussion/discourses: we can engage the viewers to a certain extent, but not beyond that for there is a reason to have intellectual discourses among learned and philosophers, because they are brainier and more sensitive, and it is their job not our viewers'.

This raises a huge concern in relation to engaging viewers with a cause, and this is why hosts like Nadeem and Qureishi are not even bothered to use their fora for such awareness programmes. It is a general assumption on the part of anchors/producers that the viewers of their content are not intelligent enough to engage in serious debates on gender-based issues. They have to oversimplify the content, to make it more palatable. If the producers' concept about empowerment is different from that of the viewers, then the intention to empower fails. Since these formats claim to offer viewer-generated content, the issue becomes even more complicated. An important concern in relation to this is 'how well these producers' know their viewers' version of empowerment and what do these viewers want to watch in terms of gender-based empowerment. Within this discussion on empowering viewers through breakfast shows, all the anchors also raise a crucial dimension about the viewers' strength. Sawaira Nadeem sees this trend of viewer-generated content as empowerment of women as viewers:

SN 45:41: I can see women changing, and more empowered, in a way that our female viewers have the power to see what they want to see on breakfast shows, and I just wish they wake up and realise that they do have some sort of power, they are worth so much more, elevate themselves to new heights.

Viewers at times express their tastes of viewing through emails. Nadeem finds her viewers are empowered in a way that they reject anything that comes across as boring, despite its social or political value. The ratings also highlight certain tastes as more popular than others. However, when I probe further into the engagement patterns of viewers in relation to 'debates and discussions over gender-based issues', Nadeem mentions her reservation on viewers' lack of interest in issues of 'social' relevance like this:

SN 05:00: Public debate: some of them want to, but unfortunately most of our viewership is middleclass and not to sound condescending but a lot of them are not so ready to participate in how the society is functioning, or they may not be so confident in themselves. Primarily, the reason to participate is about, beauty problems, health problems or how to make their homes look better.

With regard to day-to-day themes of breakfast shows, it is somehow evident that viewers are more interested in discussing issues that have to do with the home, personal grooming and relationships. Sawaira Nadeem also mentions that their viewers are not socially motivated enough to engage with political and social issues. However, Wahidi even argues, that their lack of interest in engaging with political and social issues, is due to the cultural and religious norms that glorify woman's role as a dependent to the male member of the family. She point outs,

SW 09:00 'since the day a girl child is born, mothers start talking about their dowry and their marriages'. With such an upbringing, these women have become stubborn, they don't want to take charge of their lives, they live off their father's and later their husbands' pockets, our society has made them so stubborn and not willing to change.

Wahidi and Nadeem raise yet another concern that women who are watching them are not willing to participate or change. This lack of interest with issues of social nature speaks volumes about the interests of these viewers, and it is in a way suggesting that their viewers are obsessed with their own lives. They enjoy their dependency on men. It is once again bringing us back to the question about how we can define 'empowerment' in the Pakistani context. For many, it

can be about full dependency on male members of their family or becoming the queen of the household as enshrined in Islam (see, Chapter 1). However, one can identify their frustration for producing for viewers who are not engaged to issues of a social and political nature. Wahidi has used her platform for arranging weddings for the victims of gender-based crimes, such as the victims of burns, and women who seek shelter in different shelter homes.¹⁰⁰ During the textual analysis, it came to the fore that Wahidi's show is more democratic in terms of gender-based issues; she has also taken up the issue of sexual ambivalence or gender identity crisis on her show.¹⁰¹ In this particular episode, she even shares how difficult it was for her to highlight this as a topic on her show. Wahidi, in particular mentions that she wants to do something constructive on her shows. She makes it a point to address live-callers with their first names rather than as the Mrs of someone, but she believes that women are not ready to change. However, one can still not be sure of how viewers react to any particular content. Interestingly, viewers of breakfast shows who do not seem to be participating in issues of social nature, reacted to a recent incident on Wahidi's show where the production team and the host were accused of blasphemy. As a result, her show has been pulled from the screen and the entire team has been suspended. This incident has sparked protests in different talk shows and on the streets.¹⁰² Therefore, it is important to note that viewers do

¹⁰⁰ See for example: Uploaded by Khoobsurat g. Utho Jago Pakistan Sarim Burney Welfare Trust available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8crVJjaAzU> (Accessed: 23 September, 2014)
 Pak Morning (2012) Utho Jago Pakistan – 1st May 2012 part 3/7 High Quality available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IJwyHjEULc> (Accessed: 23 September, 2014)

¹⁰¹ See for example: Uploaded by PakMorning (2012) Utho Jago Pakistan 1st May 2012, Part 3/7 Utho Jago Pakistan, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IJwyHjEULc> (Accessed: 23 July, 2014)

¹⁰² See Boone, John (2014) Pakistan Geo News becomes latest target in blasphemy accusation trend *The Guardian*, 22 May [Online] available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/22/pakistan-geo-news-blasphemy-pakistan-sufi-song-wedding>

engage in some instances, but in instances where viewers think it is necessary to engage, especially in cases where the content challenges *Shariah* explicitly. This also endorses the idea that her viewers may be less of a public for the gender-based content and more for religion, which makes them more responsive towards issues related to religion.

Nida Pasha, another morning show host usually creates discussions around the importance of personal grooming and how to strengthen relationships at home. Consider, for example, how she suggests that her influence on her viewers is limited.

NP 10:16: I don't think that I can, or shows of similar nature would change anything in the society, but things can get relatively better.... I can probably make my viewer think about domestic issues and make them more tolerant towards them.

As a host, her approach towards such issues conforms to the existing norms of society. Therefore, I raise a question about what her team's motivation is in bringing real-life cases onto the screen, to which Sina Pasha, who is the director of this show instantaneously replies:

SP 14:22: Is it not just popular demand. There are times when we want to do something serious as well. ... For example, we had a victim on our show who was raped by an MNA's son and she was facing some issues with FIR, we followed the case on our show and it helped. But at the moment, I hardly see any agenda for women's empowerment or emancipation; it is more of a competition for better ratings. Nida (Host) gets emotionally involved with such issues and she often cries on sets, but she believes that her emotional attachment to such issues can have more impact on the viewers. But at times,

we also work closely with Ansar Burney Welfare Trust that brings its cases in our shows and we try to facilitate the legal process with media coverage. There was a three-year old girl who was abandoned by her parents, and she was brought on our show by Sarim Burney (representative of Ansar Burney Trust), and this girl was later adopted by someone on another breakfast show.¹⁰³

Popular demand may be one of the reasons here, but intention to do something for the society is clearly apparent in Sina Pasha's reply. In addition, for the host of this show, the issues have some emotional value. What it holds for the gender-based issues is also noteworthy here. On one hand, it renders a '*space for coordination*' between the victims, NGOs and the law enforcing agencies, while on the other hand, it informs the viewers about the gender-based crimes in the society. This dimension of gendered content in breakfast shows has the potential to give confidence to those who want to seek justice and serve the purpose of 'bringing victims/as well as marginalised groups to have this 'occasion' for sharing a platform with politicians, lawyers, and activists working on the ground for justice.

Such a practice on different interactive programmes has familiarised the viewers of PTV with the trend of watching politicians, activists and law enforcing agencies sharing the platform with victims (from the lower strata). The state channel in Pakistan was regarded as an elitist medium, where content was produced for a certain class; even if it was watched by a large population, it remained elitist in many ways (See Chapter 4, Section 4.1). As television

¹⁰³ See for example: Uploaded by Sarim Burney Trust (2013) Maryam's Poem for Sarim Burney at Good Morning Pakistan http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x17q6lu_maryam-s-poem-for-sarim-burney-at-good-morning-pakistan-nida-yasir-show_shortfilms (Accessed: 23 September, 2014)

diversified in genres with private channels, viewers from all classes could voice their opinions on this medium. Not only their presence, but their ability to express their minds or even share their ordeals shows impulses of empowerment on screen, and it even bridges the gap between different classes. Television, in this way, becomes a kind of a melting pot where viewers from working class can watch the inside stories of the elite class in the drama serials, while the viewers of privileged classes gets to know about the lives of the working class, not only through drama serials but also on interactive genres.

The anchors of morning shows are conscious of their limitations in furthering an emancipatory agenda, unlike Maya Khan, who believes that she is a feminist who is adamant to help victims of gendered crimes through her show.¹⁰⁴

MK 30:54: I am a feminist and if rights of any individuals are violated on the basis of her gender, I raise voice for them. I do believe that woman is a weaker sex, legally, socially religiously and economically. Woman is weak and I admit to it, I don't want any woman to get exploited on this premise.

Unlike other hosts, Maya turns out to be the only host who is vocal on her position as a feminist; however, there is an issue with such an approach towards feminism, which treats woman a degree lesser than man or subservient to the male members of the family. In fact, Pakistani television culture actively engages in this particular form of feminism that finds answers to the problems of women within the paradigm of religion. In this way, the possibility of finding discourses other than religion has become almost impossible mainly in

¹⁰⁴ See for example: Walsh, D. (2012) For Many In Pakistan Television show goes too far, *The New York Times*, 26 January [Online]. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/27/world/asia/for-many-in-pakistan-a-television-show-goes-too-far.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (Accessed: July 26, 2014) (Accessed: 26 July, 2014).

interactive genres. In fact, it will not be wrong to say that the discourse on feminism in a way becomes restrictive whereby, women struggling for identity, have only one possible route available to them. In this perspective, a woman does not struggle for defining herself as an individual or finding an agency, rather she ends up defining herself as a Muslim woman, where her identity as a Muslim comes much before her identity as an individual seeking equal rights as a man. There are, of course, issues with such a definition. The question it raises is whether women are consciously seeking to reclaim their position as Muslim women or is it that they do not have any other possible discourses to choose from. As talk shows are mostly driven by therapeutic and emotional talks, they mostly thrive on religion-based solutions that operate within such realms. Such a tendency also suggests that such discussions on these shows are merely about reordering the roles of women within the home, and on the one hand, it pulls them into public sphere, while on the other hand, they are pushed back into the domain of private with a set of another roles assigned by religion. Yet Maya Khan argues:

MK 09:12: I think our society has started to open up, we have started debates and discussions on issues that were never brought up before.

Though Maya Khan's show also offers a space for facilitation of gender-based cases, especially those of rape and other sexual abuse, usually, there is no serious discussion on the status of women in Pakistani society, rather it focusses on specific cases. Whether it really opens up the society for debates on domestic violence or not remains questionable but viewers do engage in post-viewing discussions on cases. Again, the point that is worth mentioning here is that, any discussion on specific cases has a limited value and engagement; viewers tend to get absorbed within the discussion on whether victims should have unveiled their faces or not, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. However, this

particular show has been active in launching campaigns on moral policing. With an element of espionage/surveillance over husbands and daughters on the request of female viewers, the team of Maya's show became popular with such campaigns. Such campaigns have been unique to this show, which even landed the management into trouble with issues regarding the invasion of privacy. The debate triggered criticism on television, print as well as social media, which addressed questions regarding 'what is moral in Pakistani society'. Apparently, this is how most of the gendered content is treated by the producers.

The anchors of morning shows are conscious of their limitations in furthering an emancipatory agenda but Maya Khan stresses that her viewers 'bring their personal matters onto her show not only to seek justice, but all for the fact that their plight can become eye opening for others' (MK 06:04). Moreover, she mentions how through her show, political parties such as MQM, the local party gets involved in seeking justice for the rape victims. Only recently, Maya Khan highlighted the case of school van drivers sexually abusing young girls. For her, the question in such cases is 'Have my viewers become cautious or not? If I have moved them, it is enough.' (MK 33:06) However, the format on her show is not as serious as compared to her earlier show (*Aurat Kahani*), which was strictly gender-based and was one of my case studies in the proposal to the doctoral project. Despite several other shows that dedicate specific space on gender-based issues, I cannot find another programme dedicated entirely to 'women-based crimes' in a manner as serious as treated on *Aurat Kahani*. To this observation of mine, Maya Khan replies: 'See, channels cannot afford to run formats as serious like *Aurat Kahani*, because many a times influential names are behind such crimes. (MK43:14)¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ See for example: Uploaded by Khan, Fawwad. (2011) *Aurat Khani Id Avi*, Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XKIsK9qtmA> (Accessed: 23 July, 2014)

This opens an interesting line of inquiry that is directly linked to the political culture in Pakistan. Reporting crime is one thing and perhaps not as risky as probing into individual cases on these shows. Usually in cases related to rape and other gender-based crimes, perpetrators belong to influential families with a background in politics. This can land anchors into trouble, and the broadcasters are not willing to take risks. Even if the anchors are willing to take up the cases, politicians avoid commenting on cases that fall into the constituencies of their colleagues. I have studied this phenomenon in another study where I discuss the absence of gender-based issues in current affairs-based talk shows (Cheema, 2014).

Not just the breakfast shows, but the crime shows also raise a voice against the inadequacies within the legal system of Pakistan. I now move on to discuss how such cases on gender-based crime are treated within the crime shows.

6.3: Producers of gender issue-based talk shows: Empowering/bringing change on producers' agenda?

So far, the discussion was around the potential of those genres that have gendered content but no underlying agenda for feminism or empowering women. However, in this section I will be dealing with those interactive programmes that are explicitly supporting the cause of emancipation. The discussion in this section will be based on three case studies, out of which two shows are religion-based talk shows (*Alim Aur Alam* and *Hawa ki Baiti*); while one is a gender-issues based talk show (*Geo Hina kay Sath*). The producers/hosts

Also uploaded by mqmloveu uploaded on 21 December, 2008, 'Pakistan 6 Halala Nikah's of a Mosque Imam's wife'. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6n06MaoUD4A>. This episode features a case of a woman named Shama who was forced six times into *halala*. (Accessed: 23 July, 2014).

of these talk shows and gender issues based talk shows acknowledge the urgency of attending to the project of gender-based empowerment.

Compare for example, how Amir Liaquat Hussain, (ex-host/senior producer/Managing Director Ary Digital, Ex-minister Religious Affairs) of *Alim Aur Alam* and Maria Khan, Production Head of *Hawa Ki Baiti* assert that they are fighting for women who are exploited by men:

MK8:20: We are not only empowering women, we are also informing them, and above all, we want our female viewers to know that just because they are women, they should not feel miserable about it.

AL09:10: Gender discrimination is there in our society and has to be addressed and it is true that I fight the case for miserable women of our society, but I fight for those who need my support, I do not fight for the women who run NGOs. I fight for those who live in remote areas of Pakistan or those who are victims within their homes, who are unheard of anywhere, and I do not fight like women who are funded by foreign NGOs and who further Western agendas. And I fight to the extent that at times I even get biased towards men.

It is strange how Maria Khan argues that she does not want women to feel miserable about their identity; however, her programme that is strictly based on religious as well as legal solutions to women's problems that refer to this gender as *naqis ul aqal* (deficient in intelligence or rationality in relation to men). When any such issue is brought before the panel of scholars, in which woman err or is held responsible of some wrongdoing, the case begins with the

possibility of a woman being naïve or *naqis ul aqal*, which may be offensive to some but, at times also works in favour of women.¹⁰⁶ With such an approach towards solving gender-based issues, the question about seeking equal rights becomes problematic. Such an understanding of 'women's intellect', can in turn make the project of empowerment quite regressive and may even encourage women to take an escapist's approach and may hide behind their naivety (endorsed by religion). I see this form of empowering as disciplining women and regulating their rights under Shariah.

While Liaquat, through his writings and speeches, has always been vocal in disassociating himself with liberal feminist expressions in society, he has asserted his position as a brother in Islam to all Muslim women fighting for their place within the home. Moreover, the connotation he attributes to 'gender issues' refers to 'women only'. Invariably, all these genres and talk shows (whether therapeutic or in-studio audience based) refer to the issues related to gender as issues related to women, because the realities on ground are harsh to any sort of sexual exceptionalism in the Pakistani society. For instance, homosexuals are not acknowledged as 'normal people or even as a variant of the normal' and they do not have any official representation in the public sphere, therefore, any issues related to homosexuals do not feature on the mainstream television shows. It is also worth adding here that public sphere, in general, is polarised between liberal women activists and conservative women activists contesting for their respective agendas on emancipating women. Media plays a role in reinforcing this polarity where liberal women activists are represented as non-*purdah* observing women with a Western outlook. (See for example, Mumtaz: 2005, 65-68) Liberal women activists have limited presence

¹⁰⁶ See: Uploaded by Hudasheikh786 4of5 07-10-2010 آرالطف. جہاں پرفیسر: تشدد پر خواتین . Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pihru_Jej8 (Accessed: 2 August, 2014).

in current-affair based talk shows on English media, such as the Dawn TV. (See for example, Talib and Idrees, 2012).

However, I would assert that with a closer look at the interactive genre, it becomes apparent that it is colonised by religion where gender and sexuality remain the two plains to fight the battle of emancipation on. Among the talk shows, the religion-based talk shows present some unprecedented trends in ratings¹⁰⁷; as a platform such shows render inoffensive, acceptable and rather popular resolutions to the gender-based problems. Religion, being supposedly mandatory, as well as a widely accepted frame of reference for the believing people, offers an easily palatable idiom through which cultural/gender-based issues can be addressed.

Another dimension to these talk shows is that of creating spaces for ordinary people's voice, who may otherwise not have a voice in public discourses, which is in itself empowering. For instance, in *Alim aur Alam*, the producer/anchor of the show receive a considerable number of calls by female viewers on issues in marriage and divorce, so the production team decided to have three consecutive episodes dedicated to the issues of divorce within Islam¹⁰⁸. It is one way in which viewers, not only exert power in creating the content which is of their choice but also identify issues that need attention in the society. In this way, 'matters of common concern are decided by the viewers who engage with these shows'. However, that does not lead to full-scale deliberation between the citizens. Rather, the utility of this show gets restricted towards identifying 'any' matter of common concern within *Shairah*. Therefore

¹⁰⁷ Fawwad Khan, AVP ARY and Aamir Liaquat Hussain on record for this

¹⁰⁸ Aamir Liaquat on record for this. Also see, uploaded by thedaxxlingschannel, Special Episodes on Divorce. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykQHI9dV-3I> (Accessed: 3 August, 2014).

the discursive space created on these shows remains in a certain way limited to the religious elites or the Islamic scholars, who of course direct the discourse into a certain direction. Still, the viewers-led content makes an interesting case for how female viewers, as ordinary citizens, are willing to participate in a public medium while struggling to find a voice for themselves within homes. What is more encouraging to see is that in doing so, they are letting go of their fears and are taking issue with their positions within the home. These viewers not only access such platforms through sms and phone calls, e-mails and writing letters is another way for people to contact the production team. So, it is not only those in urban areas with access to Internet and telephone facilities to take their voice to the public medium, but also those who still rely on letter writing as a means for communicating their thoughts.

For Aamir Liaquat, such a platform means more than just a programme for ratings, for he has a huge fan following, which brings him into a position of influencing the public opinion. For instance, there has been a case whereby Liaquat was accused of insinuating the murder of the Ahmadi community in his show. Of course, it remains debatable as to whether he did it on purpose or not, but the killing of Ahmadis just after the show went on air, raises concern for the role of the moderator in such formats.¹⁰⁹ He has also been very vocal on condemning the arrest of Aafia Siddiqui' (a female convict in the War on Terror) which facilitated the real-life movements that supported Aafia Siddiqui.¹¹⁰ In

¹⁰⁹ See for example: Two persons murdered after an anchor person proposed the widespread lynching of Ahmadi sect followers, (2008) *Asian Human Rights Commission* [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-203-2008>, (Accessed: 23 August, 2014).

¹¹⁰ See for example: Uploaded by truthforjusticeonline (2009) Interview of Dr Aafia Siddiqui's family Part 1. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qd_TuDpAINo (Accessed: 23 August, 2014).

this way, Liaquat seems to have immense influence on his viewers. Liaquat comments on his own potential like this:

AL1:09: I am aware of my potential as well, I have a huge following and I can say for sure, I can influence the way people think, so if my services are taken for changing minds, I will be more than happy to do that, but the governments are not really interested in such things. They consider me as an extremist, so does the West. In fact, I would stress that I am the most liberal person who tries to find solutions to our problems within Islam, and such solutions are more palatable for our society. I am targeting women through my show, I try to empower them through religious and moral counselling, and I believe that influencing the minds of mothers can bring change in many households. I do see this power in my show that it reaches directly into the homes of our viewers where women are mostly watching and are getting aware of happenings around them and of their own rights too.

Throughout his interview, home and empowerment of women remained the key terms. In this regard, he makes it clear that he is conscious of his power over the viewers, and how he can alter the power struggle between male and female members within home, but he acknowledges that any such effort at governmental level would make a huge difference in society. There have been instances where media has facilitated policies/bill in parliaments, but empowering women through religion is perhaps still not on any secular government's agenda. Pakistan is an interesting case where religion is on the rise in the society while the governments are secular. Therefore, the tension between citizens and the state can be easily spotted, not only in society but also in the mediated public sphere. And it is due to this tension that religiously

inclined public personalities, who are part of certain pressure groups, call themselves 'liberal', and, Liaquat is no exception to this rule.

In this struggle to create a pressure group on the government or to engage with the policies, Liaquat's programme has been significant in pushing policies and in some cases facilitating judiciary through moral policing. A line of argument against this, of course, questions the role of media as a system running parallel to the legal system in Pakistan. However, such trials in the garb of reporting have been instrumental in challenging 'discriminatory practice in the name of culture'. Liaquat identifies them as:

AL01: 01:04: There have been instances where our programme has also facilitated the judicial process. One such case was where a man admitted on our show that he murdered his wife, and later he denied any such doing in the court, so the law enforcing agencies requested for the footage from us to present in the court. Similarly, we identified eight graveyards of *Karo Kari* victims (so-called honour killing victims), which were then taken under government custody. People can now go and recite *fatiha* (prayer) for the deceased, and it is no longer treated as a graveyard for the outcasts. In such cases, I get involved personally and follow it up with the government and on my shows to facilitate the process.¹¹¹

Unlike other hosts, Liaquat has also been a Minister, as well as the Managing Director to one of the leading channels (now President Express TV), and that

¹¹¹ Uploaded by Blissfulcreature (2009) Special Program on Honor Killing. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjsSlqtTskM> (Accessed: 23 August, 2014).

brings him into a position where he can work hand in hand with other functionaries. Usually, murder in the name of honour takes place within rural areas where feudal system/practices defines the social fabric, and even religion becomes irrelevant in such areas. Therefore, there is simply no question of accommodating the law of the state. Interestingly, many feudal lords are members of different political parties; therefore, these member do not take any initiative against such practices. It was only when Musharraf (who belongs to the urban middle class with no rural/feudal roots) was in power that Liaquat could take such a step to utilise his platform for identifying eight graveyards for the so-called honour killings.

For Liaquat, engagement of female viewers with his content is also important, and he repeatedly mentions that, '95 percent of his viewers include women who see him, 'as their brother, son as well as husband, and this affects the men around them badly'. (AL05:50). I ask him that with his commitment towards raising exploitative practices to empower women, how helpful it is to address women only, to which he replied:

AL10:15: I am addressing the male chauvinists and bear in mind that my programme is watched in homes, it is not something that you would watch in a public space, a restaurant or an office. So, home is the space where the viewing of this show takes place where people watch it with their family members, and the time slot is such that men are watching television at this hour, especially in Ramadhan, *Alim Aur Alam* has an ideal time slot for family viewing, so I make the most of that time and address the men.

Once again, Liaquat stresses the importance of home as a place of viewing as well as a sphere where women struggle for their rights. Even when he is

directly speaking to male members of the households, what one has to bear in mind for such shows that have been phenomenal in the Pakistani television culture, is that these formats translate empowerment in the idiom of religion that has its roots in patriarchy. For liberal mind-sets, it is synonymous to suppression; however, those who follow such shows do feel that the resolution of their power struggles within, lie in *Shariah*, which for women does not mean altering the hierarchies within home, rather claiming rights within those hierarchies. Even the callers who are liberal in their approach to their lives do not prefer calling onto such spaces. Therefore, Liaquat clarifies that:

AL12:42: So, it is true that I am raising voice for women's emancipation but through Islam, and I fully believe women should be given rights in the light of Islamic scriptures, so I try my best not to go beyond *Shariah*. I am cautious in my speech and I try to not to violate those limitations laid by *Shariah*.

Even if the solutions to the issues lie in *Shariah*, one cannot be certain if these talk shows offer spaces where women feel extremely comfortable in voicing their fears because panelists on such shows hardly have female panelists. Apart from that, there is also a dearth of female Islamic scholars who enjoy similar reputation to those of male scholars. Therefore, *Hawa ki Baiti* (no longer on air under this title), was conceived as a show that was one step ahead of *Alim aur Alam* in its commitment to provide confidence to female viewers, but unlike *Alim aur Alam*, there is no commercial motive involved in producing this show. As part of the vision for the show, there are only female panelists who build up a discussion around the questions/issues raised by the female viewers. The counselling provided on this show focusses more on how to solve an issue of the raised nature, with an intention to help all those women (with similar issues) who are out there watching but are not able to contact any such forum. Therefore, Maria Khan claims:

MK0:38: I feel that the female panel on such show is very important for it gives them (callers) certain level of comfort, which they may not find with the male panelists. And this show is the first one of its kind, where legal counseling as well as guidance under Islamic jurisprudence is offered on the same show.

Such a constitution of the panel can give confidence to female callers, but during the textual analysis, I find that *Hawa ki beti* is equally popular among male callers. This in turn empowers women in the capacity of preachers and clergy. In our conversation, Khan also raises an important issue in matters of 'obtaining fatwa' through such programmes. She mentions that if any female viewers need a *fatwa* or religious edict regarding matter, then we do not have an option of female *mufti* in Pakistan¹¹², therefore panelists on her show are mostly female Islamic scholars, and if they need a *fatwa* on any issue, the show approaches *mufti* through telephone.

The producers of such shows are also not interested in revealing the identities of the victims and are committed towards 'bringing some sort of relief' to the viewers' life. Therefore, when I asked Maria and Liaquat about what sort of social value their programmes have, they replied:

MK14:19: We do understand that he/she whoever calls, calls for his personal problem, but unconsciously he is pointing towards a problem/issue that runs in the society. For us, it is the issue of social value, but for the caller, it could be just his/her personal problem.

¹¹² As far as I have researched, Pakistan has this option of *muftiha* (female *mufti*) in a religious seminary run by Maulana Abdul Aziz. For more information, see: Nisha Neservere (2014) Aik Din Geo Ke Sath 04 April 2014 Host Sohail Waraich spends a day with Maulana ... Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYEocI9TmJE> (Accessed: 8 August, 2014).

Maria Khan's argument can be directly related to the question of the utility of the public sphere. Viewers engage with this show in particular for personal reasons but that also makes them part of the public discourse. The question for this research is of course, whether viewers engage as citizens or as individuals trying to seek answers to their personal problems. As Anne Philips (1991 quoted in Miller, 1993: 4) puts it, 'we would be acting as citizens if we publicly campaigned for men to take a full share in the household tasks; we would not, however, be acting as citizens when we sort out the division of labour inside our own home. In the older language of democratizing everyday life, each of these was equally political. In the new language of citizenship, only the one that takes place in a public arena can seriously contend for the name.' For instance, when a female viewer seeks *fatwa* (religious ruling) on an issue of private nature, she is engaging in a public discourse on gender-related issues. In such cases, the personal, which is political eventually, becomes part of the mediated public sphere.

In the mediated public sphere, if one is looking for some programme having a striking similarity with the ideal public sphere, where serious discussions take place in a depersonalised way, then Hina Bayat's show (not on air) on Pakistani television was somewhat closer to it in the initial years of its production. Initially it was called *Uljhan Suljhan* (Problem and Solution), and later its title changed to *Geo Hina Kay Sath* (Live with Hina). This show featured discussions, with elements of rational critical debate between the panellists and in-studio audiences, but if it stretched as far as to deliberate policies then it was yet another disappointment. However, the format was based on the concept of picking up a case (that they received from the victims either by email or letters, explained in a serious manner on the show representing both sides), than developing it up in a talk with accusations between the two aggrieved parties,

it was rather discussed upon by the panellists and the in-studio audiences. The panellists for this particular show ranged from psychologists and lawyers to Islamic scholars. The show was carefully conceived in such a way that the in-studio audiences were not just ordinary citizens but rather university students and the vision was to create a discursive space. However, when the concept of paid audience came to the industry, 'their motive for coming changed, and soon we realised that they are not interested in the debates'. (HB09:30), explains Bayat. Here, one may notice how commercial industry has influenced the quality of in-studio audiences. Bayat also had an intention to start a discourse not only on a public medium but beyond reception as well. Bayat described her motivation for this show as:

HB24:41: My motivation was two pronged, first being, starting the discourse, not just giving the information and second; starting a discourse at home.

Needless to say, this show also featured cases on gender-based discrimination, but for this host, gender did not simply mean women. For her, the term *gender* is more helpful in treating women issues for it does not abstract men from the issues. Bayat argues:

HB 01:00:09: Calling for women issues, itself isolates women in a way, that you tell half of the population that you are not concerned, though they are the ones who need to be addressed.

While discussing the issues of raising gender-based content, Bayat discussed how tactfully she had to address to issues in the name of gender. She referred to gender based issues as social issues. Looking at the conservative environment in Pakistan, she handled such issues differently. Homosexuality, which is hardly raised as an issue in Pakistani society, was approached by her as a disease or a mental condition. For her, it was important to raise such an issue, which she thought would have been impossible without 'taking it as a mental

condition', which was anyway looked at with contempt by the critics. What is worth noting here is that the mediated public sphere may appear to have democratised over the years, but there are some areas that the society has not opened up to. This show ran for six years, but was pulled off the screen, because the management of the channel thought that such shows become monotonous and after some time, they become too depressing to offer something new and more engaging.

The role of the anchor was also of some concern to the management. The channel was critical of how this show had changed over the years into a programme where the element of a public sphere was replaced by a show that was more host-oriented, where the consensus and conclusion represented the host's opinion. This particular show had never drawn extraordinary ratings, but the channel continued airing it for years for it had social value.¹¹³ The host of this show mentioned how at times, she had started to bring in emotions, to make the content sound more serious and engaging. Such tastes in viewership, do raise questions about whether emotions-laden spaces can engage viewers with serious issues or even inform them about their rights, if not deliberate policies. Shows similar to that of Bayat, offer serious discussion around gender-based issues of the society, and such fora offer a favourable format for deliberation, but interestingly, the marginalised groups whose issues are under discussion often refrain from participating in serious formats. However, breakfast shows and crime shows that may not run on a motivation to push Bills show clear signs of 'visibility of the marginalised groups'. Bayat weighed each case, in relation to its social value, and her approach towards a single woman's ordeal is that it is not about a single individual but also about those related to her. Such an approach adds weight to the gender-related cause, and

¹¹³ Badar Ikram and Fawwad Azeem on record for this.

invites viewers to behave in terms of citizens rather than as individuals who may only be interested in 'one person's story'. Such shows are aimed at viewers/consumers and not mostly at the policy makers, unless the channel so decides or the government shows confidence in the media for any pre-political campaign.¹¹⁴ The channels which may not be interested in airing anything with a motive for the empowerment of women, may show extraordinary interest in airing campaigns on a certain issue if it is funded by the government. It was not only the 'Women's Empowerment Bill' that has been pushed for debate in the parliament but also a 'bill' on recognising 'third gender'.¹¹⁵

One concern that resurfaced through all the discussions around gender-based empowerment was that religion seems to be an elitist discourse that cannot be revisited by anyone, not even the clergy; therefore, anything that has been defined within *Shariah* cannot be retranslated in any other idiom. Imran Aslam, as President of Geo TV, explains how his channel ran a campaign on the Women's Empowerment Bill, 'IA 26:06: We ran a campaign for more than one year, where entire spectrum of clergy were taken on board before taking the Women Empowerment Bill to the parliament. This way, media are facilitating consensus policies. I would not say that there is any such thing as Talibani environment in Pakistan as long as you do not step in their area (Blasphemy).¹¹⁶ Badar Ikram, the Business Unit Head of Geo TV, describes such a situation in a similar vein by saying, 'we can contribute in changing the society but society is driven by many other external factors. We are living in a very extraordinary

¹¹⁴ As it happened in case of Women Empowerment Bill under the campaign of *Zara Sochayay*.

¹¹⁵ See for example, Javed Ahmed Ghamidi (2012) Grand TV Debate on Hadood Ordinance – Mufti Muneeb ur rehman vs Javed Ahmed Ghamidi. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFwqPu2SI6Q> (Accessed: 23 August, 2014).

¹¹⁶ See: Javed Ahmed Ghamidi (2012) Grand TV Debate on Hadood Ordinance – Mufti Muneeb ur rehman vs Javed Ahmed Ghamidi. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFwqPu2SI6Q> (Accessed: 23 August, 2014).

situation. State of fear is heightened... can't discuss on religion, these interest groups are strongest!'

By interest groups, Badar Ikram, of course means religion-based pressure groups and factions that, time and again, assert their power in issues related to blasphemy. This issue cannot be seen in isolation; in fact, after a series of instances where rage and anger has been expressed in the name of religion, society in general and television space in particular have become cautious on issues that have recently become off limits.

6.4: Conclusion:

In this discussion about gender-based content and change or empowerment, I have looked at two broad-based genres in Pakistani television culture: narrative form and interactive genres. More specifically, the discussion was based on data generated from the production side of the television industry. In relation to the issues raised in the Conceptual Framework, this chapter confirms that the writers use the genre of drama serials to further their agendas (liberal and conservative interpretations of role of women in society). In this way, this genre turns out to be a space for occasional unconstrained discourse that is somewhat free from religion-based pressure groups. The interactive genre on the other hand, is colonised by religion. Matters of common concern are decided by the gate-keepers but also by the viewers. The gate-keepers/producers are aware of their limitations in facilitating a public sphere in a religiously inclined society. Pressure groups such as the clergy and government have a role to play in determining the limits of this public sphere. On the bright side, drama serials have played a role in engaging the viewers with social issues, in the case of *Roag*, *Tum Ho Kay Chup* and *Bol Meri Machli*. In a similar vein, the interactive genres have played a crucial role in facilitating the

system on ground for speedier trials (in the case of identifying graves of honour victims), building a consensus on policies (*Zara Sochyay*) and also coordinating with civil society for re-assimilation of the homeless and victims of gender abuse. This chapter also identifies that although it is a commercially driven industry, the creative workers try to work on projects of social-value.

The central theme of this chapter was to explore the agendas and motivations of the producers in empowering viewers. What it foregrounds is that 'empowerment' and 'bringing change in attitudes towards gender-based issues' are understood in two different ways. On the one hand are the producers who believe that representing inspirational roles that stand against oppression can bring some change in attitudes, on the other hand, there are producers who believe that reflecting dark realities can bring some change in the society. Writers, directors and producers are divided on the issue of empowerment but their opinion is reflective of the socio-political conditions in Pakistan. It seems that it is almost inconceivable to openly challenge the hegemonic (Shariah-compliant) ideal of feminism and empowerment for women. At the same time, this shift marks a transition from endorsing culturally mandated roles of women to a role that is regulated as well disciplined under Shariah. In this way, any project for empowerment turns into a project of disciplining women within Islam. In this process, cultural citizens are tempered and channeled to behave and respond in a certain manner. In this regard, Chapter 7 will explore how viewers react to such representations and how they respond to the questions posed in this chapter.

Chapter 7

Women empowered or disciplined through gendered content?

Chapter Six reviews how the creative side of production addresses the potential of gender-based content to bring change. This chapter is an extension of the same debate. It will look at how viewers respond to the narrative that fall into the category of changed content and analyse how viewers understand the potential of gendered content in empowering women and bringing change. I look at how viewers engage with the same questions (raised in Chapter 6 p.194) across different genres. The chapter is broadly divided into four sections on the basis of genre. In the first section, I look at the engagement patterns with drama serials that motivate viewers to rethink about their positions within the home, and how they sensitise viewers about issues such as child rape. In the second section, I assess the viewers' engagement with religion-based talk shows. The third section briefly looks at the dimensions of breakfast shows and whether viewers find themselves engaging in relation to bringing change. The last section addresses how viewers appropriate the treatment of gender-based crimes in crime shows.

7.1: Patterns of engagement with emancipatory trends in drama serials:

The discussion in this section looks at how 'themes' of different serials have motivated viewers to rethink about their positions within the 'home' and 'society'. It focusses on how their understanding of the society informs their act of reception and that, in a way, reinforces the politics of representation on screen. This chapter also looks at whether they think that drama serial as a genre can 'change' their perception/approach towards gender-based issues or not.

I will begin by examining 'what drama serials hold for the fabric of home for female viewers'. All housewives seem interested in discussing themes centering upon 'relationships within marriage' and hierarchies within the home. Invariably, the themes that matter most to them are 'how to save marriages' or 'how to discipline the behaviour of women within a relationship and in relation to society so that their dignity is protected'.

Consider for example how 'four housewives aged between 30 -35, of middle class background', engage in this discussion about *Qaid-e-Tanhai* (Imprisoned in loneliness) - a serial in which the protagonist has to live with her in-laws as her husband migrates to England to financially support his family. For years, the protagonist lives without her husband and is also forced to do all the housework (very typical of South Asian households). As a result, she decides to walk out of the marriage and marry someone else. Her right to assert herself is looked upon with contempt by her in-laws and she is called the 'transgressor' (See Appendix: 3). The women who are commenting on this drama serial and its potential to engage with home-based issues, live in joint family systems and engage in the discussion in such a manner:

Farah: Drama serial is the most engaging genre for women at the moment, it can really change the way women think. I think the biggest issue in our lives is to live with in-laws. I watched *Qaid-e-Tanhai*, it is worth mentioning in this discussion for it raised the issue of the importance of a woman in the capacity of mother-in-law, and how she can make or break a home.

Alia: To be honest, as viewers we could feel the pain of a married woman who was separated from her husband for so long and was almost abandoned in her

in-laws' home. We can even relate to her protest against the situation she was in. Her attempt to marry someone else was justified in the circumstances she was living in, but, if you ask us, whether we would sympathise with someone who is in a similar situation to this one in real life, I would say, never. In fact, our society would criticise a woman in such a situation to the extent that she would commit suicide. It is true for 'now' that we are unable to sympathise with such women in real life, but this drama serial has shaken us up, so it can be that if we are shown such themes repeatedly, we may as well stand up to such a cause. (Sohni Chalet 4)

Farah and Alia live in a residential compound of Sohni Chalet. They are both friends and neighbours. Alia lives in a joint-family system while her husband works in Saudi Arabia and sends money back home. She is on relatively good terms with her mother-in-law. Farah, on the other hand lives in a joint family system in which her mother-in-law is sovereign in decision-making. The domestic issues in her family are so grave that she is almost confined to her room. Relating the 'plot' directly to their situations, Farah speaks on how abusive her own mother-in-law is, and how drama serials, as the only avenue of entertainment for women in Pakistan, should raise such issues. The issues raised in this particular discussion can be unfolded further into two dimensions. First, the hierarchical order within the home, which supports either the supremacy of male members or that of elderly women who acquire a position of power with time, through which they can manipulate decisions at home. Second, it raises another important factor in relation to the biases society has against women who want to reclaim their rights in marriage (such as that of nuclear set-up, sexual relations). Here, emphasis is on how dominant discourses of culture that breed submission to those in power, and how home is a place where this power struggle can take several forms. Linking it to their own subjectivities, these respondents do not have issues with their husbands. Rather,

their concern is regarding the politics of joint family system. Moreover, they assert at some other point in the discussion that such a system has no room in *Shariah*, which shall be picked up later in this chapter. However, another disturbing concern is raised when Alia says that any woman in a situation similar to that of the protagonist would face such fierce criticism that she may even kill herself. However, these Farah and Alia take content very seriously do think that if cultural issues are repeatedly taken issue with, a change is likely to follow in the society. In this sense, this content has certainly stimulated a discussion among these viewers about change. The discussions among the viewers certainly represented the case of assessing the TV content in perspective of their understanding of the real world and more importantly their immediate context rather than engaging with this serial as 'one person's story'.

In the same residential compound of 100 homes where I conducted these focus groups, a group of middle-aged women (aged 50 and above) comment on narratives based on the 'power struggle between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law' in this manner:

Shaheen: All of us have watched *Meri Zaat Zarra e Benishan* (My 'self' – a speckle unfound), it was a terrific serial, and it must have given the message to many. It was about how a woman who doesn't want a particular girl as her daughter-in-law ruins her life by tarnishing the girl's reputation. And it is true that hypocrisy is common in our society, with the use of the Holy Book selective. Raising the issue of differences between mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law again and again can be helpful in managing the relationship as well. But, we should also learn from *Meri Zaat Zarra e Benishan* and *Qaid e Tanhai* that daughters-in-law are not supposed to be arrogant, and that they have to compromise on many levels. I don't think God has created woman to nurture the trait of ego in her.

Tahira: I do agree that drama serial might not have played a central role in changing the perceptions in relation to the treatment of daughter-in-laws in the society, because mothers-in-law are not all that bad these days. In fact, we can see change in our society (compound of 100 duplexes, where this sample was based. It is no more as it was two decades ago, and it is because of the fact that my friends around me and myself are educated women, and we treat our daughters-in-law properly. Now, mothers-in-law are very careful in saying harsh things to their daughters-in-law, because we have realised that if we object to every other thing, it would mean that our sons would leave us for a nuclear arrangement, so now we keep to ourselves within our homes. But, we have learnt it all from our own observation and from what goes around in different households in the society; I don't think television has played any role in it. (Sohni Chalet 3)

Some interesting findings resurface through this conversation, where women who are at an age when they have either become the mothers-in-law themselves or have attained a position of authority within homes, take issue with the narratives that represent the mothers-in-law as controversial or notorious figures within home. The issues raised here offer a reading different from that of younger housewives who are living in a joint family system. For these respondents, the dominant message in the drama serials has to do with the fact that 'daughters-in-law must learn to obey', and be compromising enough. In these serials, both protagonists are wrongly labelled as 'transgressors', but they refuse to give any explanations to their families. It is shown as their 'way of protest' against, or 'loss of confidence' in the family members. For younger housewives, such an act of 'silent protest' and 'calling them transgressors' symbolises the unjust practices at the hands of mothers-in-law, but middle-aged women appropriate it as an act of 'arrogance of protagonists' and therefore worth disciplining. The discussants do not speak at length on the narratives and

characters' ordeal. Rather, they relate the narratives instantly to their realities, and how people in similar situations in real life react to such issues. Therefore, an issue about the 'role of mothers-in-law' in the viewers' neighbourhood is brought under consideration, and except for one respondent in the group, all agree that mothers-in-law are more careful in their interaction with their daughters-in-law. Also, once again, the issue of 'protecting the joint family system is raised'. For aged women, living in joint family system with sons is a suitable option, therefore it is never brought up as an arrangement that does not comply to *Shariah*, under which a woman can exercise her right to have her own separate home. While attending to such themes, drama serial as a genre democratises the public as well as private sphere with an inclusion of issues that break the silence on the exploitative nature of the family system, thereby initiating a discourse within 'viewing publics' on redefining the nature of the domestic sphere. It is also worth noting how reading of the same media-text changes with the viewers' own experiences in life. But such issues related to 'home' also raise concerns about society's obsession with relationships and issues of personal nature rather than issues such as poverty and equal opportunities for women in public sphere. This concern is raised by one of respondents in her 40s, who is also based in Sohni Residential Society:

Roohi: Today, there is no effort being made to address the moral degradation of the society. There is so much (content) on differences between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, or misunderstandings in a relationship, but the need of the hour is to address the social issues and to come closer to our religion. We have to look at the bigger issues now rather than what is happening inside our home. Look at how the world is progressing, and we are still struggling with these relationships at home, our life revolves around issues that are meaningless actually.

Even later in the discussion Roohi discusses the 'harassment of women in public spaces'. She also mentions that relationships within home are not worth discussing when compared to the issues women face outside home. Apparently, this viewers distances herself from issues focusing home and is more concerned about the issues women face in the public spaces. However, she seems sure that answers to all such issues lie in the teachings of Islam. This eagerness to seek a solution for every problem in Islam comes up again and again. Whether it is in real life or on screen conflict, the resolution of every problem seems to lie in Islam. In a way, it creates a public of Muslim female viewers. What one has to understand here is that both culture and religion consider women to be subservient to men, but religion offers more comfort and relaxation to women than culture in Pakistan, especially in case of her right to have a private place/home. Among the Middle-aged women in Lower Middle Class such sentiments are seen:

Baji: But what is needed more is to show the joint family set-up in homes on screen. We miss those drama serials on PTV, in which the joint family system was glorified, and we still believe that it is such a set up that nurtures love in relationships. Such themes would benefit female viewers in marriageable age, for they would come to know how to behave in front of their father-in-laws and brother-in-laws and the elders in the family.

Shehnaz: These days, all these drama serials are promoting nuclear family system, which is not good for the unity of the family. (New Karachi 2)

Baji (elder sister) lives in a household with her husband and five children. Two of her sons are married and live in the same household. Baji is the mother-in-law who is very much in charge of the decisions regarding domestic issues. Joint family system is an affordable arrangement for her family, therefore the discussion here is neither about the narratives that highlight the ordeal of women in marriage, nor about the question of a 'separate home'. Rather, they focus on 'what should be raised in drama serials'. To them, it is important to have 'stories based upon extended family structures and they emphasise how drama serials play a crucial role in engaging unmarried girls. In focus groups with the Lower Middle Class, issues within the joint family are simply not raised. In fact, there is a recurrence of the sentiment to 'see more stories based on such systems'. Therefore, discussion in these groups stresses upon 'regulating the interaction of women with brother-in-laws and father-in-laws'.

A similar discussion on the joint family system and the role of mothers-in-law within it, is also brought up within the sample of Lower Middle Class Young female viewers, who discuss how certain drama serials are so close to reality in highlighting the 'curse of mother-in-laws' authority in home:

Asma Bhabi¹¹⁷: 14:00: It is not just *Maira Naseeb* (My destiny) or *Mairi Zaat Zarra e Benishan* that is so close to our lives which are dominated by mothers-in-law, there are many other serials too, and they speak directly about our lives. But it will never change them even if they are watching such dramas.

¹¹⁷ Bhabi is the word used for sister-in-law.

Bari Bhabi (elder sister-in-law) B: Yes, it may not bring change anytime soon but it will change with time, for one day, we will also become mothers-in-law who will be caring and not dying to control. (New Karachi 8)

Change is not something that can be acquired overnight. It is a never ending task. Similar concerns are raised by Middle class Young University going viewers in such way:

Hinozia: I liked *Humsafar* (Companion) because it highlighted how relationships can break because of misunderstandings created by any third party, in this case, created by the mother. It is a common practice in our society, for we live in joint family systems where mothers can influence the relationships of their sons to the extent that there is no looking back. Another somewhat similar representation was shown in *Meri Zaat Zara e Baynishan*, where a mother-in-law who is apparently religious ends up ruining her son's home. And believe me we do have such hypocrites in real life too, and these are the issues that occupy most of the married women's lives.

Zenobia: But I think this is sheer exaggeration on part of the producers, you cannot have such women in real world that would just let go of their homes and their marriages, but would not respond back to their in-laws. So, why do these writers have to come up with stories where protagonists are often shown as weak creatures that cannot take the right means to assert their selves? Why should we have representations that do not do justice to the actual strengths of a woman? If the reality is so bleak then the characters should be inspiring enough to change this reality. In *Humsafar*, there was hardly any story at all. They exaggerated the misery of that woman for over 20 episodes, and in the end she forgives her husband and the mother-in-law for throwing her out of her house.

Samra: But it is not as simple as that. The characters can inspire us, but we will not be able to change the fabric of this society unless we change the approach of our families too. We are absolutely nothing on our own. If we become confident, but our family sticks to the same norm, which does not allow women to speak for their rights, then such confidence would not have any particular impact on our lives. Yes, it can change realities for our future generations. It is in our culture to appreciate such daughters who comply with the whims of their parents and later with those of their in-laws. (KU 5)

Hinozia is the only married girl in this sample. She lives with her in-laws and her response described how she felt about joint family system. While Zenobia, a student of Psychology Department is one of the two girls who does not cover her head. She appears to be somewhat liberal in her approach towards gender based issues. But, even in this generation the 'discussion' revolves around the curses of joint family system that make 'home' a field of power struggle, and that change is a long process. The case in point here is *Humsafar*, a serial that had record breaking trends in ratings in the last ten years. The story is fairly simple in which yet another protagonist's morality is brought under question by the mother-in-law, and she is subsequently thrown out of her husband's house. Here, in this discussion among the viewers, there is a consensus on one ground: the role of mother-in-laws is controversial in Pakistani society.

However, what is worth noting here is that the young viewers take issue with the 'politics of representation' of women on screen. For Respondent B and C, the issue lies in 'the fact that women in Pakistani society do not stand against the exploitative practices', and therefore want to see the representation of what 'should be' rather than what 'it is like'. This is similar to how writers such as Bari, Ahmed and Moin stress upon the importance of inspirational characters

(see Chapter 6). It also draws attention to the fact that these respondents assume that TV can directly influence its viewers.

For these viewers who are already attending university, such representations whereby girls are criticised for stepping out of the home is usually looked upon with contempt. Comparing themselves to such protagonists who simply have no voice, they feel offended, which speaks of the fact that their reality 'at this moment' is different from that of married women. Almost all housewives within the Middle Class, aged 40 and above, have also been to university and had some sort of exposure to the outside world before marriage (see Chapter 3). One cannot be certain of how these respondents would react when in a situation similar to other married women. Therefore, Respondent C raises an important issue in this regard while relating the subject directly to the actual root cause of the problem, that is, the overwhelming strength of religious and cultural norms that make women vulnerable in marriage. Her interpretation leads us to appreciate the reality of society created on screen, which glorifies 'woman's silence and her obedience to norms'. This viewer also raises the question of a woman's limitations in freeing herself from the tradition of exploitation, which has its roots in culture. Younger married women on the other hand, are caught in the struggles of a nuclear home. Empowerment and change for them starts at home, beginning with a space of their own, a separate kitchen and a separate home. Here religion therefore, comes to their rescue, however, for older women, religion does not seem to be as relevant to their immediate needs (that is, their age-related dependence on their sons).

Developing the discussion further, I now examine another angle that highlights the issue of 'vulnerability of position of a woman within marriage

and her home'. In this connection, I will look at how Middle Class women living in Ancholi, discuss the vulnerability of women in wedlock. Consider, for example, how 'housewives discuss the drama serial titled *Jannat Say Nikali Hui Aurat* (Woman expelled from Heaven), in which a woman who is married for 35 years is given verbal divorce by her husband in state of anger. As a result her marriage becomes null and void. It is a specific condition under Hanafi school of thought among Sunnis, according to which, divorce can become irrevocable if the intention to divorce is pronounced thrice in a singular incident.¹¹⁸ The title of this serial signifies the importance of home by calling it a heaven for married women. Consider, for example, how two groups of 'housewives' who are not even following the Hanafi school appropriate the text:

Zaheena: These days we are watching *Jannat Say Nikali Hui Aurat*. In this serial, there is a message for all married couples that they should be patient with each other. It has a lesson for those who do not compromise on issues within marriage and end up in divorce, which has a disastrous effect on women in particular, and children. This story tells us that a woman is not secure in her house even after 35 years of marriage, and she does not have a space even in her children's home.

Ammi (Mother): I have been telling my daughter not to argue unnecessarily with her husband for it may have bad consequences for her marriage, but she wouldn't just listen to me, until she watched *Jannat Say Nikali Hui Aurat*, where a woman had to walk out of her 35 year old marriage.

¹¹⁸ See for example: Saifeddin M (2011) Three divorces in One sitting. Available at: http://www.muftisays.com/blog/Seifeddine-M/1098_02-02-2011/three-divorces-in-one-sitting.html (Accessed: July 28, 2014).

Haya: I even made my husband watch *Jannat Say Nikali Hui Aurat*, and I asked my father to watch it too, it is the story that tells you how vulnerable the institution of marriage is. We make drama serials for family viewing time, and the post-viewing discussion ends up in an argument in which men of the household blame the female character for initiating any gender-based conflict. (Ancholi 2)

Once again, it is evident how effective the narrative and its execution is, for viewers directly engage with the issue rather than the story because it touches upon a personal chord. Zaheena, Ammi and Haya raise three issues in relation to marriage. One, it is an arrangement that demands several adjustments on the part of both parties involved. However, I would stress that there is a possibility of insecurity involved while engaging with this drama serial or any other in relation to divorce, *halala* or second marriage, for men have this allowance/exemption of having four wives at a time within Islam. Although it is not encouraged as a practice and a singular arrangement is more approved of, nevertheless, Muslim women live with this insecurity. The second issue raised here is the urgency of encouraging men at home to watch such drama serials that highlight 'issues in relation to marriage', which, in case of this particular family ends up in a conflict of ideas. It shows that drama serial are at least effective in triggering discussions at home, a kind of post-viewing discussion. (See Dahlgren, 1995 for public sphering in viewing context). It is also obvious that the law of divorce favours men rather than women, for they can give verbal divorce at any point should they wish to, whereas, women have to seek it through courts. This reinforces the position of the man as being a degree superior to that of the woman in marital arrangement, and brings the woman in a position to compromise and submit to the will of her husband, which is obviously a point raised by Zaheena and Ammi. It is interesting to see how these women take direct lessons from such narratives for their marriages. But,

what is worth noting here is that, these women have not raised concern over a law that provides male characters in such serials or men in society with a position in which to exercise it wrongfully. In fact, all of these respondents have a preoccupation with the Islamic value system while approaching the issue, and therefore have no concern about 'why a woman is so vulnerable within marriage'. Why does divorce occur within three sentences? Or, for that matter, why 'home' is signified as 'heaven' or the 'ideal/only sphere of activity' for women? It is also worth mentioning here that Zaheena belongs to Ahle Tashi community that follows Shia Islam, according to which divorce does not occur in three sentences:

Zaheena: 'I fail to understand why they have not approached a religious scholar for some counselling on this issue. It should have been part of the story. Marriage and divorce fall under *Shariah* and the writer should have encouraged finding a solution in religion. The writers must show religious practices, and find solutions of gender-based problems in religion.'

This woman points towards a crucial factor in the treatment of such serials that highlight the issues of divorce and *halala* but fail to open up a discourse that gives viewers a fuller understanding of such laws. Even then, it is not about questioning the law itself or seeking any other arrangement, but finding a solution within the *Shariah*. However, what is encouraging here, is to see that as cultural citizens, these viewers are at least revisiting their positions within marriages. They are asking questions about the vulnerability of their position in marriage.

In this connection, middle-aged women in the affluent Middle Class in the residential compound of Sohni Chalet also stress that that drama serials can raise *Shariah* based issues in a way that invites the viewers to have a complete

understanding of the subject. For instance, (55 years of age) Tasneem argues that a recurrent theme on *halala* is not helpful in engaging with the issue itself¹¹⁹:

Tasneem: There is no harm in showing *halala* but what is more important to bring onto television is the procedure of divorce in *Shariah*, if they make that clear, *halala* would not be even in question here. Yes, drama serial can take the message home, *Teri Aik Nazr* (One glance from you) was so effective in highlighting that a widow shall have equal rights as any other citizen of the society. (Sohni Chalet 1)

Interestingly, Tasneem wants to watch an elaborate description of ‘matters of divorce’ in accordance with *Shariah*, which obviously involves *halala* as well. However, neither she nor any other viewers raise the issue of seeking divorce under State Law or, for that matter, ‘how can women *seek* divorce under *Shariah*’. It is also apparent that Tasneem and other viewers watch drama serials to reflect on women-oriented issues. For instance, Bushra Ansari, who had based one of her scripts on *halala*, mentions in our conversation on drama serials that she only used ‘*halala*’ as a dramatic tool rather than an issue to be raised in itself through her drama serial. She thinks viewers can only engage with stories for the sole purpose of entertainment. However, the viewers seem to be more interested in the issues rather than the stories of characters. There is another limitation in addressing the issue of *halala*. This practice is particularly endorsed by the Hanafi school of thought in Pakistan while others such as Ahle Hadith and the Ahle Tashee do not follow it. Taking issue with *halala*, in a manner that comes across as a practice against *Shariah*, can bring forth protests

¹¹⁹ As already mentioned in Chapter 5, Tasneem is a middle-aged woman who actively participated in the discussions. She lives in a nuclear family system and is happy with her sons living independently.

at many levels. But, it is in the drama serials that many controversial issues are raised and which engage women to a level that they question rulings in other schools of thought. I see it as a breakthrough and the beginning of a conversation about the weaker agency of women in Islamic thought.

This discussion is further explored with another question on *whether drama serials can change reality on ground and if not what are the constraining factors*.

Tasneem and Nighat both in their 50s go on to answer this question:

Tasneem: I don't think that media in general, and television in particular, has come to appreciate its strength over its viewers, for there are hardly any genuine attempts for social awareness. I think women are shown as weak creatures and this is something we cannot come to terms with. If we were to change the reality on ground then we have to change the representation of women on television as well. The producers have to realise the power of a woman as well, a woman can make or break a nation forever, so the characters should aim to motivate young girls. Women should realise their strengths rather than crying over their sorry states. And we do not see any content that tells us about our rights in this society as women, but there is some limited attempt on just highlighting issues really.

Nighat: But I think, drama serials are reinforcing the stereotypes, in fact they are trying to glorify the unhappy housewife heroines whose miseries become the plot of drama serials, but this should not be the case, we should have representation that is inspiring for women, that let us know about our rights and can educate us enough to fight for our place.

(Sohni chalet 1)

Nighat and her husband also live independently in Sohni Chalet, their son lives in the United States of America. She emphasises the role of producers in aiming for some change rather than highlighting miseries of women. She says that the actual root cause needs to be addressed, viewers made better off with knowledge on their rights. This interest in having representations that are 'inspiring enough' is a collective aspiration shared by almost all the viewers who claim to have lost interest in depressing representation. But, does that mean that these women are willing to give up the stereotypes attached to their personalities in real-life? One can still not be sure if they are ready to do away from their roles as subservient wives and daughters-in-law.

Another interesting finding among the educated women raises the question of viewers' expectation from a particular media-text. In this case, these viewers want more knowledge in terms of rights of women under the state law. This is what I gather from off-record discussions on religion and society. Even if the mediated public sphere is predominantly occupied with representations that are not inspirational, there are occasional narratives that take into question the moral ascendancy of existing norms, which glorify 'obedient/sacrificing women'. For instance, in Fasih Bari's drama serials, he usually builds his case around the hypocrisy of the society, and how women manipulate their position within homes, or on the life of sexual exceptionals. Strangely, except for a few, no one in my sample mentions following Bari's drama serials. Those who do mention them are not happy about opening up the space for transgenders, or showing women as sexually liberated. It can be because within these focus groups, women were not comfortable about opening up regarding their viewing tastes or perhaps 'their version of an inspirational character corresponds to the image of an obedient housewife'. However, in all of these groups the 'obstacles' in changing the realities on ground are also discussed.

First, let us have a look at how Middle Class women aged 50 and above express the limitations:

Tahira: I don't think watching these narratives would make any difference to the state we are in at the moment, because even if we, as women want to raise our voice for some cause, we will not be allowed by the male members in our homes. We are still dependent on them and do not move as freely on our own.

Shaheen: There could be exceptions to this rule, but majority of homes in Pakistan have this hierarchical order within home, where men have supremacy over the women as represented on screen. And unfortunately, a lot of it could have changed, had our governments been more responsible and conscious of giving rights to women. In the West, women can report domestic abuse, but here, the law does not protect us that way, and we are not informed about our rights under State Law. If a woman reports domestic abuse to the law enforcing agencies in Pakistan, she is harassed further, and often been told that it was the right of your husband/brother or your father to subject you to such treatment. So, awareness through drama cannot take us anywhere, unless we have active judiciary and sincere police officers.

Shaheen's father works in the police department in the province of Punjab therefore she is more vocal about the consequences of reporting in Pakistan. But it is still disturbing to see how these women in their 50s have accepted the hierarchical structure of home. The existing norms that reinforce the hierarchical structure of the home and the culture of corruption in society have made these women lose confidence in the system. With an experience of living in a society where culture is superior to law, they argue that such narratives or any other content is not helpful unless it informs them about their rights. And even if they are informed about their rights, there is simply no way that those can be exercised

within Pakistani legal system for mainly two reasons. First, the state law is still far from governing the 'private sphere'; since Islam is the dominant religion, state law is also made in accordance with *Shariah* (See for example, Chapter 1). This complicates the situation for women who are treated a degree lesser than man, and obedience to male member is mandatory. Second, even if women want to proceed a case in a court of law, the procedure is so lengthy and the environment of courts so hostile to women, that they prefer a solution within religion. Therefore, any attempt to challenge the present status of women in Pakistan has to be very strong and preferably a collective action against customs as well as against the system. However, one can still notice a degree of interest in knowing about the state law, and there are certain expectation from the resource offered by popular culture. These viewers demonstrate eagerness to learn about their citizenship rights through drama serials. At the same time, these viewers as insiders to the society are also aware of the weaknesses of the legal system and this distrust in the system also affects their engagement with the content.

Even among the women aged 50 and above in the Lower Middle Class, there is an understanding among the viewers that narratives are the actual reflection of society along with this frustration towards the representation of women as unequal partners in marriage and even in society. The question of hierarchy within the home, and the position of women as docile and inferior to men have become sources of frustration for viewers in this group. Look at how women aged 50 and above within the Lower Middle Class raise issue with such representations:

Baji: The representation of women on television should be such that woman must be shown as equal to man in society, it should not be portrayed in a hierarchical order in which man is superior to woman. We do not like the stories of miserable women, and don't want to see women as powerless

creatures. But, don't think that producers are exaggerating the facts on ground, in fact, whatever is being shown is about our own reality.

Shehnaz: Watching such content in women oriented shows, has not changed us in anyway, or does not have any impact on our mindset at all. In fact, we continue to live the way we used to, but we are better informed of what's happening around us but it doesn't imply that we change our ways about anything within the home.

What is worth noting here is how Shehnaz argues that television may be reflecting the actual status of women within society, which they may not even approve of, but it does not suggest that they would take issue with such matters in real life? For Middle Class women (aged 50 and above) who are more familiar with the legal system of society, defying norms is a challenge not only inside the home but also in the society, and therefore not worth taking risks for at the moment. As for women in the Lower Middle Class (aged 50 and above), the politics of representation is disturbing but not motivating enough to take issue with. These reactions reflect different levels of engagements such as ambivalence and distrust, both rooted in the knowledge of political and legal system. This thought is further developed when housewives aged between 30-35 engage in the discussion on the genre's potential in bringing change:

Alia: It is not at all easy to change one's negative approach towards society, and if anybody has a nature that does find fault in others and have nothing positive to offer to the society, you just cannot change him or her, it is almost impossible to change someone who is just not willing to give up negativity or for that matter some attitudes.

Farah: I still believe that the producers should be aware of their power over their viewers; they should be very intelligent and visionary I would say to bring change in society. Television viewing is in our routine, and it can bring change, not drastically but in ways that you may not even take notice of. It is not like a medication that would work instantaneously or a wrong medication that your body can react to. It is something that has a long lasting effect if watched daily, and you do fall prey to it without being conscious of it. Do we not follow fashion through television? Have we not changed our interiors or for that matter added a lot many dishes to our food at home?

This is an interesting exchange between Farah and Alia on whether such content can bring some change in the attitudes or not. Alia argues that no matter how much producers wish to change the 'behaviour of women' towards gender-based issues, nothing will change unless women themselves are willing to change. Even if a few practices are exploitative, there are a considerable number of women out there who find pleasure within the hierarchical structure of family. I think Alia was referring to Farah's mother-in-law. Living in the same neighbourhood, residents of this colony know about the issues Farah faces at home. Farah draws attention to the trends women pick from television. It is interesting to note how these viewers want to watch content with inspirational characters and with information on rights, and yet they doubt that habits deeply rooted in the culture of patriarchy will change. But, among these viewers, there is an on-going reflection on state of women in home and in the society. Look at how young students explain this phenomenon on screen that translates morality in religious sense:

Nadira: Whatever you watch on television about women reflects the actual state of women in Pakistan. Just by watching these drama serials, you can get to know how women are treated in Pakistan. In our society, when girls step out of their

homes, their characters become doubtful for others in society, and this is exactly what is shown on television. And if a girl comes from a lower class background, her life is even more miserable. Even if a girl goes to a university or college, her character becomes so vulnerable, and a man in the capacity of a husband can never be wrong in our society. If there are any issues within marriages in Pakistan, they ought to be women's.

Safina: In *Mera Naseeb*, *Meri Zaat Zarra e Beynishan* and also *Bol Meri Machli* (Speak out my fish), the story revolves around women whose morality is under question, the moment they step out their homes. And drama serials are pointing towards such trends in our society, and we can learn a great deal out of these narratives. We, as young girls, can at least pick this up from these narratives, that if such a situation arises in our real life when people look at our character with suspicion, we should not hide ourselves back in our homes, but should assert ourselves to claim our place as honourable citizens in society. But with such lessons in the drama serial, there are some negative aspects to the content; there is too much glamour on screen that can even be harmful to some viewers, who want too much from life. (KU 6)

Even as students of English literature, Nadira and Safina take issue with 'the representation of women on screen' in a way that they question the dilemmas they face as they enter into the public life. In this regard, the issue raised directly relates to 'how the private sphere is supposed to be the ideal sphere of activity for women' and how morality is brought under scrutiny if a woman seeks to step out of her home. While these respondents seem to be resisting the representations of women on television, there is still an acknowledgement that such representations are real. This can be problematic when viewers believe that screen is just an extension of society, in a way that they do not question its fictitious nature. Rather, they consider it to be an 'accurate reflection' of society,

which suggests that the world 'outside home' is not women friendly. This is obviously not true for everybody in Pakistan where the society is not culturally homogeneous. The perception of realism in this genre can particularly create an illusion of truth/facts for viewers who are separated from the public sphere. The argument of these viewers is that the images that are produced in the name of realism can alter the perception of reality. Likewise, it raises concerns about the 'emancipatory ideal' for Pakistani women. It does not have to do with asserting their rights as equal citizens or being financially independent without being amoral. Rather, it encourages them to assert their rights within the home. For these girls, the reality is obviously different, for they have already stepped out of their homes and are seeking their goals in education, but they may as well be from families that have not opposed their participation in the public sphere.

This discussion on drama serials has thus far examined how viewers appropriate the gender-based content in drama serials. The issues raised in this regard pursued three lines of inquiry: firstly, the viewers of all classes raised the issue of joint-family system and linked it to their own subjectivities. The second issue that these viewers deemed worth discussing was that of *halala*/divorce in Islam, while the third issue addressed the question of whether realistic representation in drama serials can bring any change or not. The viewers' discussion in the last category reviewed how findings oscillated between how drama serials should have inspirational representations to whether content can have influence on viewers or not. It also discussed how viewers engage with such representations to rethink about 'the image of an ideal woman' in Pakistani society. In the last section to this category of drama serials I look at the case study of *Roag* (Sorrow).

As already discussed in Chapter 6, *Roag* is one of those serials that has had a direct effect on viewers and also on debates in the mediated public sphere. *Roag* is important for discussion mainly because in almost every focus group, this particular drama serial is mentioned as a reference for an 'emancipatory project on screen'. The story revolves around a girl who was raped at the age of nine when her mother sent her to buy something from a nearby shop. The rest of the serial revolves around the stigma rape carries and the issues of assimilation for the family and the victim. The producers of *Roag* argue that the impact of this serial can be attributed to the fact that the scene of crime falls into the category of 'public space'. That, in other words, has made it a public issue. It should also be noted that there is nothing extraordinary about the cast and the styling of this project. As already discussed in Chapter 6, the producer of *Roag* did not intend to initiate a cause for debate or shake mothers up to the reality of child rape, but it is worth noting how it moved women in their capacity of being 'mothers' to take certain actions. Let us have a look at how, Middle Class young mothers have appropriated this content:

Mehwish: For instance, we watched *Roag* recently ...we know of mothers who are now on guard in sending their daughters off to any local shops, and do not leave their children unattended in the streets to play. This drama serial has made us aware of the threats that loom in the streets. And these days, if you become realistic, at least two out of ten news items a day are about sexual abuse.

Nazia: Even I am always watching my children while playing outside though our colony is safe. (Sohni Chalet 3)

Even though these respondents live in a closed compound of duplexes where there are no shops inside, the narrative shakes them up. The execution of this drama serial is also somewhat different from others. While viewers criticise

other serials for not engaging with the actual issue and not unpacking it up to the point of telling viewers the rights/laws that govern the subject raised, this serial touches upon all of it. The story does not end with the serial; in fact, it initiates some sort of awareness campaign among viewers, and also on some other genres. As anticipated, the Middle Class housewives based in Ancholi, which is a densely populated area and in the heart of Karachi, with many local shops within residential streets, voiced their concern over the matter like this:

Shumaila: Yes, we do remember watching *Roag*, it was an eye opener for the mothers, who are careless about their daughters. After watching this drama serial, we would not let our daughters step out of the house without an elder of the family, and we would not let them go to shop down the street. We have even asked our daughters to watch this drama serial, so that they protect themselves better. Such drama serials are surely offering service to the society. Obviously, we are at home and we do not know what is happening outside, so a serial such as *Roag*, informs us about the dark side of the society.

Most of the women were living in a joint family system, therefore the 'we' in their speech, refers to all women in the household, unless any one of them disagrees within the discussion:

Hina: We are typical housewives who are no longer attending any schools or universities, and we mostly accompany our husbands to roam about in the society, so for us, television is the only window to the world, and we really want it that way. We want programmes to show us the real picture of the society. It is also important for us to know about the world outside of this home, because we want to guide our children better about this world.

Urooj: For me, it is more important to know about the world because my daughter is at a very tender age, and I feel I have to protect her, so drama serials

such as *Roag* are a must watch. (Ancholi 4)

Shumaila, Hina and Urooj live in a joint family system and are married to three brothers. All three are at least graduates and have been to universities.

However, marriage has changed their lives to the point that they rely on television to bring 'outside realities' home. *Roag* stirred a maternal instinct of protecting children. I would stress that all respondents took it far too seriously, because they were separated from the public sphere, and that is why viewers in the Lower Middle Class raised the issue of paranoia that such content creates:

Asma: I think *Roag* was one project that has served to open our eyes, and we no longer send our daughters to play in streets, and are even careful about where they go and what they do.

Hira: I think television can play a crucial role in changing attitude of people towards women. With *Roag*, we have become paranoid and are scared of people around us; I couldn't have come for this session leaving my daughters behind at home, so I brought them along. I don't let my kids go to school on their own or on after-school tuition; I stay with them all the time.

Maria: I had to leave my kids with another friend of mine, so that I could be part of this discussion. There is no way that we can leave our kids unattended anymore. These fears are looming on our minds because we watch stories about the ways in which crime is carried in this society, and we are unable to find anything on attempts being made to eradicate it.

(Ancholi 7)

This drama serial, as well as other content in relation to women has disturbed the viewers to the extent that they have taken steps to protect their children, but the paranoia it carries for the viewers has its roots in a law enforcement

mechanism that is so poor. On the one hand, this drama serial becomes a window to the outside world for women staying at home, and it also connects them to the realities of the public space, but on the other hand, it in turn reinforces the segregation between the public and private spheres. It is also due to the fact that gender-based issues/crimes raised in the news are not very different from the gender-based issues in the drama serial. The element of realism is so profound that viewers also take drama serials as the closest representation of reality, especially viewers with low social power.¹²⁰ The 'reality of society created on screen' is in a way controlling a public-private divide by creating 'a world of potential dangers' in the public domain. Even if it is based on reality, the closure of almost all programmes takes place in offering some behavioural code for women and simply nothing for disciplining men. Such a code of conduct does *not* focus on rebuilding moral code in a way that women are seen as individuals with equal right to protection of self as men have, in the public as well as private sphere. The discussion instigated by the question: can drama serial bring some sort of change in our attitudes in relation to gender, is further built by these respondents asserting that they have mended their ways as mothers, and are now protective about their children. However, throughout the discussion, there was criticism on the government, law enforcing agencies and the judiciary for not delivering their due on gender-based issues.

No matter how frustrating it is to watch such content, all respondents appreciate the democratisation of this space to the point of addressing such issues. The discussion also reveals an element of unpredictability and selectivity in viewers' choice for content. In case of *Roag*, they do not seem to raise issue with the non-inspirational character of the protagonist or whether the content is

¹²⁰ See for example, Glynn, 2000 for regimes of knowledge on television for people with low social power.

suitable for the lounge or not. Although joint-family system and *halala* are also raised as issues of concern, but the private nature of those issues (that is within home) do not seem to give a unanimous call for a cultural talking point. *Roag*, on the other hand, gives an account of the outside world that is not directly related to viewers' subjectivities. Therefore, *Roag* on the one hand becomes a resource of knowledge for them (about the outside world) while on the other hand it invites them towards reflecting on this issue as cultural citizens. In fact, I would argue that these viewers want something more in terms of knowledge they get from the television. Their reliance on the popular culture is more than for instant gratification or pleasure. They seem to be ready to engage with political nature, they want more information on their legal rights. Therefore, I argue that drama serial, in this sense offers a domain for 'political engagement' and it stimulates certain pro-civic actions. It can also be seen in terms of how some texts offer more opportunity for performance of cultural citizenship. This performance also allows women to think about the existing binary of the public and the private in Pakistani society.

But it is not just in the narratives that engage women with such issues, interactive genres are more popular in bridging the gap between the public and the private. The next section will highlight the engagement patterns of female viewers with religion-based talk shows.

7.2: Viewers' engagement patterns with religion and social issue-based talk shows:

Women's participation in the mediated public sphere through interactive genres is an essential part of this study. This section analyses the reasons for engagement of female viewers with religion/social issue based talk shows, and assess whether such formats facilitate the patterns of 'change' in the viewers' lives or not. More importantly, it raises the question of how these viewers take

this access given to such formats. Similarly, I also address the issues that seem to hold them from engaging with such shows. The discussion here first addresses the issue of utility of this space as a resource for religion-based knowledge as opposed to the *madrassa* (religious seminary), which can be difficult to access. The second issue addressed in this section relates to the question of whether personal issues should be raised in religion-based talk shows or not. Lastly, it raises the issue of whether viewers can access these shows without the permission of their *mehram* (male guardians) or not.

In this context, let us begin with the viewers' responses from the Lower Middle Class (New Karachi) who appreciates the role of such spaces in 'connecting' them to the public sphere:

Shehnaz: We really like *Alim aur Alam*, and it is a good format for asking questions on religion. Since we cannot approach an *alim* (religious scholar) in person, it is an easier way to call and ask for any religion-based query, and you have to appreciate that the *alims* on these platforms do not aim to answer the questioner only, it is all who are watching and listening to be informed about the question in point. Yes, why not, our daughters and daughter-in-laws can call on such programmes, they are also part of this society.

Ruqaiya: Through *Alim aur Alam*, victims do seek protection as well, and it is one way to let other men who are watching, know, that not all women may now suffer in silence, and can take their ordeal to these shows too.

Baji: I think I can call on *Alim aur Alam*, because approaching a *maulvi*¹²¹ (cleric) in real life is rather difficult, and men know more on religion than women in our society, we would first ask the male members in our home. If they do not assist us, then I would certainly call any religion based show. And if I get the

¹²¹ Hindi and Urdu word for religious scholar as well as religiously inclined people. It is even used to address people with a beard to imply their religious inclination.

ruling on anything, then we follow it with all our heart. My sons want me to veil my face, and my husband is against it, but I do what my sons tell me to, for they are religiously inclined and know more on religion, and I cannot go against a religious teaching. (New Karachi 2)

For these women, such shows and *Alim Aur Alam* particular have become a resource for their knowledge on Islam. If 'religion' is what gives women the confidence to assert their positions within home, such platforms are not a bad choice for them at all. What is worth noting here is how Ruqaiya takes this show as a resource to 'let other men know that women will not suffer in silence'. If unpacked further, *Alim aur Alam* can be the voice of women who suffer in silence and those who share concerns similar to those voiced in this show. However, most of these women are still dependent on male members' version of religion, whether it is in their homes or on the panel of any such shows. A few women even mentioned that they would rather get in touch with female scholars of Islam, for any ruling on 'matters of intimate sphere'. For example, another middle-aged woman in the lower middle class of New Karachi asks:

Ehsana: Do we not have *Quran* in hands that we have to call on such shows, besides, it is usually a male panel, so if women want to discuss something, they should contact *Alima* (female religious scholar) for that. Now, we have so many women who have graduated from the *madrassa* (religious school), and have considerable knowledge of religious texts. These days no one trusts these *maulvis*¹²², and it is not even safe for women to contact them. (New Karachi 5)

¹²² Hindi and Urdu word for religious scholar as well as religiously inclined people. It is even used to address people with a beard to imply their religious inclination.

It also raises the issue of segregation between the sexes that is so profound among the practising Muslims. Women are reluctant to call on such shows where there are male panelists, and if they cannot call on such platforms, they can obviously not think about going to the *madrassa* in person. Here, one may bear in mind that their reluctance in approaching the male scholars in the mediated public sphere does not have to do with the difference of interpretation, but rather their adherence to the religious teachings that bars them from interacting unnecessarily with men (see Chapter 1). There are two significant issues raised by Ehsana who is also Asma's mother. First: the restricted/controlled movement of women in the society makes it almost impossible for them to reach the *madrassa*, second: there are hardly any avenues on television to approach female scholars where issues of personal nature can be discussed openly. There is another concern regarding the safety of women. In recent years, *maulvis* or bearded men are looked at with suspicion. Several cases of crimes have been attributed to bearded men (See section 7.4). Among many reasons, women even reported that they are more concerned about their security inside the *madrassa*, for they have built an image of the clergy through representations on screen. In several crime stories, *Imam* (who lead prayers) of the mosque (of not so high repute) have been accused of gender-based crimes.¹²³ Women and children have become cautious of interacting with the local clergy.¹²⁴ What is evident throughout the interviews is the unwillingness to get

¹²³ See for example (2012) Mosque Imam rapes kills a 12-year old, *The Nation*. Available at <http://www.nation.com.pk/national/13-Apr-2014/mosque-imam-rapes-kills-12-year-old-girl> (Accessed: August, 2, 2014).

Also: Khan Ahmed, N. (2014) Seminary Head among four held in gang rape *Dawn*. Available at: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1106150> (Accessed: August, 2, 2014).

¹²⁴ Imam in local mosques and maulvis in the neighbourhood who teach the *Quran*.

in touch with a *madrassa*, for instance the middle-aged women in New Karachi highlight the issues in going to a *madrassa* like this:

Ruqaiya: Yes, we will call on *Alim aur Alam* if we want to clarify some issues of not so sensitive nature, but wouldn't bother going to a local *madrassa* for it. Because going to a local *madrassa* in person would mean to let the neighbours know about your issue and I have to ask anything in relation to my husband, I wouldn't even seek his permission for calling.

Ruqaiya who are able to engage with such platforms to seek counselling in relation to home-based issues, will nonetheless protect the *honour* of their family. The idea has roots within the teachings of Islam, which urge husbands and wives to conceal each other's faults. But throughout the focus groups, a recurrent concern is about not approaching the *madrassa* (religious school) on their own. On the one hand, women can participate in public life as live callers in talk shows but on the other, the physical segregation has become even stronger. This is of course related to the image of the *maulvis* represented on screen. Therefore, one can notice how 'private' is understood in several ways and how women revisit the issue of segregation while engaging with such shows. The first concern is that personal issues should not be taken to the mediated public sphere while the second concern is that if women were to access a *madrassa*, then neighbours can also spot them near it. In Pakistan, women do not go to a *madrassa* or a mosque. Therefore, seeing them near one can be directly taken as a step to seek *fatwa* on a personal matter. A middle-aged woman in the Middle Class also stresses that she would hesitate in going to a local *madrassa*, for another set of reasons:

Tasneem: I think if we have any issues related to *Shariah*, we would either resort to different resources offered to us on Internet, or on television or the books, I

don't think we would really get in touch with a *madrassa*. We wouldn't be bothered to take the pain of going to a particular *madrassa*, and it is also important to know the reputation, standing and command of an *Alim* over the subject. I can't be bothered to ask this *Alim* anything in relation to women's issues who is so conservative that he declares those who wear Western wear as *kafir* (non-believer).

The liberal Muslims as well as those who have access to other resources do not find such *Alims* helpful who interpret Islam in its literal sense, which is at odds with their version of Islam. What these scholars hold in terms of their version of Islam is too debatable because gatekeepers control which scholars can participate. This makes it possible for a large collectivity of like-minded people to engage in such domains. It is evident that there are different approaches towards issues that fall within religion but what emerges, as a common sentiment among the viewers is that they will not like to get in touch with *madrassa* in real lives. The mediated public sphere, in a way, has addressed their reluctance to engage with a *madrassa* by reducing their gap with scholars - from all schools of thoughts. Despite this, in my sample, only one woman admitted to having participated on such formats.

Producers have also noticed that women in urban areas do not interact with their shows through e-mails, letters or even phone calls, and according to their understanding, one of the primary reasons for it is knowing the system too well - women in the middle class do not find such participation worth it. There is an element of distancing too from those who are uneducated as can be seen from the respondents' comments.

So far, I have looked at how viewers stress the importance of this genre in opening up a convenient avenue for knowledge on religion on television. This seems to be a way easily accessible for the viewers, but in the discussion that follows one finds that accessing the mediated public sphere is not just a call away. The space offered by *Alim Aur Alam* lies at the intersection of the public/private divide in society. To take a step in the direction of participating in live shows can be read directly in terms of negotiating the boundary laid down by *Shariah* and the customs. Consider for example Farah respond in a discussion about the issues she may face in participating in to such programmes:

Farah: But the dynamics at home differs for me, I would have to take my mother-in-law's permission before calling on such shows. If my mother-in-law happens to come across any content that speaks on how notorious mothers-in-law in our society can be, she would simply change the channel and not let us watch it too. But, as I see it, I think religious formats have more potential to change us, for you see, there is no such thing as a joint family system in Islamic tradition, and the ruling goes as far as to cover one's self properly even in the presence of a young father-in-law. In our religion, a man who cannot afford his wife and family is barred from marriage, but in our society nothing complies with *Shariah*. Hindu culture has become far more superior to us rather than religion. If any man cannot afford a separate house for his wife, is he not supposed to separate the kitchen within the home and create a partition where two or more families share same house? (Sohni Chalet 4)

Yet again, we find this interest in religion to rebuild the existing concept of the fabric of home and marriage, which is why Farah finds such shows 'empowering'. Women like Farah who have problems in establishing good

relations with in-laws are likely to engage with religion-based solutions for marriage and home. Religion offers that comprehensive regime, which has a wider acceptance into the society and is an easier route for seeking solutions to home-based problems. Moreover, religion also qualifies for a discourse that is much more engaging and comprehensible for women than any other liberal discourse on women-related issues. Yet accessing shows that facilitate such an opportunity is rather difficult for many women. While understanding the nature of hurdles that these women face in interacting with scholars on *Alim Aur Alam* or any other religion-based talk show, I found out that even 'an act of calling on live shows' needs permission from someone who is sovereign in house. It can therefore be argued that such viewers can fall into the category of a constrained or a dormant public; constrained because of the hurdles and perhaps even dormant because taking the step to call is still not worth it or there is not enough stimuli for it.

In the context of engaging with such fora with/or without consent, even middle-aged viewers in the Lower Middle Class who follow such shows have similar reasons for not participating on show:

Mehnaz: If I were to answer this question, I would never call into such a show without my husband's consent, because I have never even called my sister-in-law without his permission, how can I call in a show, you see. My husband doesn't want me to do anything without his consent.

The viewers in this sample are mothers-in-law, and over the age of 50. Yet they insist upon the importance of the consent of their *mehram* before calling on such shows. Then an anticipated question can be, if they cannot be calling on their own, would they be able to act upon the 'solution' offered through such

programmes or not. While most of the viewers seem eager to watch this show, they do not imagine participating in such shows without the consent of male heads, which raises the question: how limited is the autonomy of these female viewers? However, these female viewers do acknowledge that such shows have facilitated women's access to the mediated public sphere.

7.3: Viewers' patterns of engagement with breakfast shows:

In this section, the viewers' engagement patterns with breakfast shows are discussed. The question asked is 'how viewers engage with gender-based crimes/issues highlighted in such spaces, and how female callers enjoy content that addresses such issues through moral policing'. Not many viewers in my sample followed breakfast shows, specifically in the affluent middle class. Therefore, the discussion in this section will be limited to two aspects in programming. First, it will touch upon how viewers in Ancholi appreciate the efforts undertaken by breakfast shows in coordinating with NGOs. Second, it will analyse how viewers read a 'popular spying campaign' launched by one of the breakfast shows. First, let us assess how women are eager to appreciate hosts in their efforts to bring victims closer to justice:

Shumaila: We don't watch morning shows very seriously, but women oriented issues affect us, especially when they invite victims of gender-based crimes. The other day, two sisters were there to discuss their ordeal in a morning show. They were the victims of domestic abuse at the hands of the in-laws, and they sought protection through this show. I wanted to call in that show to appreciate their efforts in giving protection to women.

Hina: At times, we want to call; I can recall a show in which the case of a kidnapped girl was highlighted whom Ansar Burney Trust recovered from a mafia that ran brothels. I so wanted to call and appreciate the effort of the Trust

and the channel that worked hand in hand in this particular case. (Ancholi 4)

Crime reporting in Pakistani context has its own importance in giving protection to the victims. In this area of reporting on crime, almost all interactive genres work hand in hand with NGOs and the law enforcing agencies. The format for all morning shows is somewhat similar, where victims get an opportunity to gain support in financial and legal matters (See Chapter 6 for format). Therefore, from the response here, we can see how women are moved into calling in such shows to become part of the collective act of appreciation. By doing this, or simply with such intent, not only do these viewers think about the victims as part of their gendered community, but also engage with a cause of public nature that seeks to protect women.

However, the patterns of engagement with this genre are limited among the affluent middle class living in Sohni Chalet, and viewers have more negative things to say about such genre rather than positive. Only one woman (who is a retired teacher), in Sohni Chalet mentions that she follows Faisal Qureishi's morning show for it gives 'civic sense' and that makes it different from other shows. I see it as, 'deliberate distancing' from these shows, mainly because the content on this genre closely speaks to the realities of the lower middle class. The viewers in the Sohni Chalet in particular make it a point to get their 'aversion' to these shows registered. Moreover, there is also an element of distancing themselves from the pleasure (if any they seek) from watching celebrity guests on these shows.

For women in the lower middle class, such shows have a greater appeal, mainly for two reasons. One, such forums sponsor the weddings of those who cannot afford them, and two, such shows offer 'moral policing as well as counselling

for women'. The morning show that had maximum viewership was that of Maya Khan. This show launched 'spying campaigns on husbands and daughters', and the host, Maya, was later sacked by her channel.¹²⁵ Since 'disciplining women' is almost mandatory for the protection of honour, this campaign was widely appreciated by typical housewives:

Hina: We do condemn the sacking of Maya Khan, because the cause that she raised on her show was genuine. Do we not have couples dating in different parks of Karachi, or for that matter in different restaurants? It is a serious issue when girls go on dates without letting their parents know about it. Usually, parents assume that their daughters are attending colleges while they take advantage of such liberty and move about with their boyfriends; if Maya brought this issue up on her show, her efforts should have been appreciated. Those who want such liberty have disapproved of raising this issue.

Urooj: But, I don't think these hosts are sincerely concerned about such issues, they bring them up to raise the ratings of their show. Only recently, it was revealed on another show that Maya had paid actors for this particular episode, and now that she has been fired from the channel, the reason couldn't just be this particular episode, where dating in public parks was brought up.

Such shows build their campaigns around the idea that 'media is your saviour and will bring the public life of your loved ones into your home'. Those women who have restricted movement in the public sphere buy such notions. Look at how, another respondent wants to know about the activities of husbands:

¹²⁵ Siddiqui, T. (2012) Morning Show Host Maya Khan Sacked from Samaa TV. Available at: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/328465/morning-show-host-maya-khan-fired-from-samaa-tv/> (Accessed: August 3, 2014).

Zaheena: I would once again say Maya's show was really better; it was offering awareness to women. She brought issues about husbands' betrayals, and this is an important issue. I think those men who have watched it, must have thought about the importance of home and family. (Ancholi 2)

Here, one can see that viewers are familiar with agendas of producers but at the same time, they are also eager to have media's say in defining a moral code for them. Viewers in the middle class in particular are more aware of the dynamics of production and fictitious nature of campaigns like these. We cannot say whether these viewers would allow such an invasion into their own private lives or not. These shows, however, do not aim to develop a new moral order. In fact, in a country where the majority defines the 'code of life' in the idiom of religion, this does not seem to be an upcoming possibility in the near future. Rather, it seeks to rebuild the notion of 'what is moral' in the Islamic sense albeit through a platform that appears to be liberal. Therefore, these spaces do not offer a range of possible solutions to choose from, but democratisation of the mediated public sphere has helped to open the regime of religion to a range of possibilities within Islam. By this, I mean to assert that the debates on morality with moral policing or other acts of spying and surveillance, initiate a discourse on morality between liberal and conservative Muslims. In addition, they also generate post-viewing discussions in other media, where such acts of moral policing are condemned as parallel pseudo-legal systems. I would also argue that sometimes these shows can work in favour of women as well. For instance, if the team of this particular show stalked girls, husbands were also followed. In a way, this delivered a statement on television, saying that the question of morality is also relevant to men. What is far more important for this project is to see how viewers revisit the issues of morality as citizens.

Consider for example, how Baji who is in her 50s sought pleasure from viewing the act of spying on others' husband. In this group, Baji who suspects her husband of some activities that she may not know of, so she expresses herself in this way:

Baji: I really liked *Maya's* show, because she was so right to highlight that typical housewives do not know what their husbands are up to, and they have a right to know that as well. I don't know what my husband is up to or where he is at the moment. I have a right to know about his after office hour-activities. Just because we stay indoors, we should not be taken for granted.

Shehnaz: I strongly believe that taking our personal issues on television can work in our interest too. I draw strength from women who are reporting their issues on *Maya's* show. By that, I don't mean that every husband needs to be checked on public medium.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Baji enjoys a position of power at home and she has acquired this position over a period of time. Under *Shariah*, mothers hold a status three times greater (in terms of being worthy of respect) than a father. Baji's sons are quite religious and she is very well respected in her house, perhaps more than her husband. But apparently, she is not very happy with the ways her husband spends his money. Here, Baji and Shehnaz both show how eager they are to bring their personal issues into the public domain, with a view to addressing their own problems. However, Baji also raises another important issue: that the existing public/private divide has made men unaccountable to women at home. Throughout the discussions, Baji made a point of sharing her thoughts not only with me but also with her daughters-in-law who were asked to sit quietly and listen to her responses. It is also important to note that these two women, who want their husbands to be spied upon are both middle-aged.

In their 50s, they have reached an age where they are much stronger in their status as women in the home (as mothers-in-law and grandmothers), and in the society. For viewers in the Lower Middle Class (Young), this campaign was also a wake-up call for women who are completely closed off from a public sphere:

Rubina: We think that 'running such campaigns has helped us to wake up to such realities, because, like us, there are many women who blindly trust their husbands. After such shows, they have become a little cautious about the activities of husbands. (Korangi 3)

There is a trend of marrying early in this class; therefore, most of the viewers in this class were married. They lived in extended families or shared accommodation. However, there is something apparent here. Female respondents in the Middle Class sample, did not engage with breakfast shows as much as viewers in the Lower Middle Class. However, there were a limited number of university students who only followed the specific episode in which 'spying campaigns' on dating couples were run. The discussion on these episodes in particular focussed on three features:

A: And we must all condemn what Maya did on her show, it is just not appropriate to give media the right to disgrace anyone on screen.

B: However, I would say those who are working in the media and in positions to point finger at other should first look at their lives, are they living a perfect life? Besides, who has given them the right to define what is moral.

C: What about the families whom she has exposed on television. To be honest, as far as we see it, it is highly unethical to cash in on anyone's privacy for ratings. These channels do not seem interested in the real issues; rather they are

committed to the commercial angle attached to such programming.

These elements are obviously in contrast with how viewers in the lower middle class perceive such an act of policing. These young viewers are aware of how dynamics of production and are also question the right of the media in questioning one's privacy. This is surely a crucial argument for this discussion. In other words, it is revisiting the notion of personal autonomy and limits to one's privacy. It also reveals how the concept of 'privacy' and the 'private' changes with socioeconomic class and marital status. Those who fare better in terms of cultural capital consider themselves in-charge of their privacy, while those who lack social and cultural power are willing to give this right to the media to scrutinise their privacy. In this sense, the content offer spaces for critical reflection on the limits of public/private distinction.

A genre that has engaged both these classes is that of 'crime shows' with highly gendered content that highlights the crimes committed against women, which mostly includes 'rape'. Therefore, in the following section, I shall discuss how this genre has engaged women into 'thinking about gender-based issues, such as rape' in Pakistani society.

7.4: Viewers' engagement patterns with crime shows:

Throughout my fieldwork, viewers continue to mention how private channels have started a relatively new genre of crime shows with/without re-enactments, and how they have become avid viewers of this genre. A considerable number of viewers also point out that they watch crime shows because they want to know about the dangers that lie for women outside the home, and especially in rural areas, which is rather interesting, for gender-based crimes raised in this genre can even take place within homes. Another argument is that reporting

'rape' on television can be helpful in some ways, if victim's identity is well protected, but cannot really help in the eradication of crime. However, most of the viewers argue that crime shows are not helpful in 'making them any safer'. Rather, it adds to another source on 'informing' them about gender-based crimes, which mostly refers to 'rape'.

In the discussion on crime shows, the middle class housewives based in Ancholi called such spaces as a window to the world and even raised some issues related to the reporting of crimes:

Shumaila: For those who are staying at home and not working, crime watch is one way of getting to know about your society. It is our window to the world, and it warns us of the risks that can potentially affect anyone, so we become alert to it. Television is our guide to live in this dangerous world.

Hina: Reporting a crime is essential, but you neither should show victims' faces nor should reveal the identity of victim or even that of family members. We do think that we are stronger than our mothers because we are better informed, if not safer. We are more prepared for any situation that can exploit women and we may even react in our defence. (Ancholi 7)

In another group in Ancholi:

Zaheena: Would you ever call on a show where they are discussing let's say a rape issue? We do think that such discussions have a limited value, for they are never discussing the issue. Rather, they focus on a specific case, and they end up making it sensational. Another reason for not calling would be that there is no follow up to any case, nor are the culprits ever brought to justice. In fact, we have terrorist organisations operating openly despite being banned by the

government, have we ever brought them before the court of law? The cases around gender based issues are just individual cases with no solid backing to it, who would give them justice? With all these programmes on women, we are still not sure about our rights, we do not know a single right of ours. (Ancholi 2)

Reporting on 'rape' has made them feel more 'informed' about the gender-based realities of society, but here respondents have raised crucial concerns. They say that such issues should be treated on a de-personalised level so that viewers may also get information regarding their rights. In addition, when female viewers mention that they are better informed, they do not mean to imply in terms of their rights. Rather, it is regarding specific cases that feature on such crime stories, and a realisation that 'rape is a reality' in the society. It shows that these female viewers know how the legal system works in Pakistan. Even if they are not participating directly in the mediated public sphere, they are well informed about the socio-political realities of society. Moreover, viewers also mention crimes shows warn them of the risks that can potentially affect anyone...They mention, 'television is our guide to live in this dangerous world'. The genre's factual nature makes it more powerful than the genres based on fiction. I argue that the reenactment in these shows make the crime look more real than the reality itself (to use Baudrillard's idea). It gives the viewers a sense of paranoia as seen in case of *Roag*, and they share the feeling of being the potential victims. Scholars such as Richard Osborne (1995) and Yvonne Jewkes (2011) who have studied mediated crime in the Western context, also argue that 'media discourses about crime now constitute all viewers as equally subject to the fragmented and random danger of criminality' (Osborne, 1995: 27 quoted in Jewkes 2011: 31). Moreover, Jewkes (2011) notes: 'the audience is bombarded in both factual media and in fictional representations, by crimes that are very rare, such as serial killings and abductions of children by strangers. The presentation of the atypical as typical serves to exacerbate

public anxiety and deflect attention from much more commonplace offences such as street crime, corporate crime and abuse of children within the family' (2011: 32). Jewkes raises an interesting dimension to the popularity of specific news items over others in mediated crimes. In case of Pakistan, gender-based crimes are rising therefore demand urgent attention, but there is also an audience for such content. For example, in Pakistani context, I would argue women who are separated from the public sphere constitute a large group of consumers for such news. Usually, viewers watch these shows for the sake of curiosity, but in case of gender-based crimes, female viewers do not express any inclination to see 'unveiled' face of rape victims. As insiders to the society, they are very well aware of the social stigma rape carries, and the problems it can create for the rape victims as well as for the family in reassimilation to the society. Apart from trauma management, there are even issues of animosities that 'unveiling faces' can create. Perpetrators can harass the victims more, and this is also explained by two other women of middle class in their 40s:

Mehwish: There is simply no point in bringing such issues on screen, I mean how does this help the victim or anyone really. In fact, it makes us very uncomfortable when our kids are watching with us. The other day, my twelve year old daughter, asked me what is *ziadti* (abuse), I didn't know how to answer that, but I just told her to be a little cautious with strangers, they can beat you, and never sit in your school van when there are no other kids in it. But nothing more than that. See, I had to be open about it for society has these elements, yet not so open for we are a conservative set up as well. This might have raised so many questions in her mind already. In a way, these programmes are also useful in opening up such issues too, but you never know who can benefit from it and who may use it for his own advantage.

Nazia: I think our television only raises issues of rape. It is as if this is the only issue left for women. There are a lot many concerns for women, we need universities for women, proper means of transportation for them and a lot of other issues as well. Women are harassed in the workplace and my husband does not let me work just because the environment is not that healthy for women. Teasing women is also common and it should also be raised on television. (Sohni Chalet 3)

In households where women cannot think of participating in the mediated public sphere without prior consent of the husband, there is an initiation of a conversation on gender-based crime and sexual education. This suggests the beginning of a discourse among viewers. Therefore, if Hina Bayat aimed for triggering a post-viewing discourse, it can be noticed that there are some households that are opening up on gender-based issues (See Chapter 6). The discussion with this group of Middle Class housewives is further built when this respondent starts to identify a range of areas that need attention in relation to women. The society has long been silent on the issue of 'teasing' and ogling women. In fact, this practice is one of the main reasons why women are asked to cover their bodies, or are even completely closed off from the public sphere. It seems that female viewers are thinking about the plight of women in Pakistani society. However, the idea Mehwish is coining here about separate universities and transport for women will also reinforce segregation. In case of crime shows, middle class viewers certainly doubt the intentions of the producers of crime-based shows, in genuinely seeking some feminist agenda or pursuing an emancipatory cause or even helping 'victims' in any way:

Tasneem: I don't think that these programmes have contributed towards change in relation to women. I am certain that the practice of *Karo Kari* and *Watta Satta* remain intact. Just look at the reporting of such crimes, you get to hear these

horrendous details of domestic violence in rural areas, but do you think reporting is enough for eradication of crime? It would have made a difference, had there been a follow up on any crime in the court of law. It is so difficult to do away with your traditions, you do what you see since childhood, it cannot be taken away from you easily. We also cannot ignore that our own politicians are helpless when any such cases arise in their constituency. They simply refuse to put their foot down to any custom. The maid that work in our homes have a married daughter of thirteen years of age, can you imagine, they all come from the same background, and they are living with us in the cities now, but there is simply no difference to their lifestyles. We scold them not to marry their daughters off so young, or even warn them of the consequences of early marriages. According to Law, Pakistani women under the age of sixteen are not allowed to marry but it seems that they have no clue about these laws. These women who work as domestic maids do watch television and are familiar of certain realities of life, but what can they do when men in their families aren't watching such content, or are not interested in changing their habits.

From the response above, I can identify some level of indifference towards the problems of the rural class, and it seems that this viewer does not see the potential of change in that class. Perhaps what this respondent and many others in this sample (in the Middle Class) remind us of is the strength of 'cultural and religious norms' in our society. The local '*jirga*' systems (tribal courts) run parallel to the state's legal system in Pakistan, and there has been no attempt on governmental level to abolish such systems, which is why we get to see 'verdicts' that have absolutely no logic in religion or state law. In a country where gender and sexuality is governed under religion, customs, as well as state, conceiving a single project for empowering women can be very difficult. According to the HRCP, in just 2011, around 1000 women were killed in the name of honour of family, and yet, a secular government and the rightist parties

are not able to see eye to eye on the issue of domestic violence.¹²⁶ For more than three years, the Domestic Violence Bill remains pending before the Senate. For women in the urban areas, religious movements are active in the public life, as well as other liberal secular movements that struggle for 'women rights' but for women in the rural areas, it is only television (if they are given access to it) to bring home an alternative paradigm that governs gender and sexuality (either driven by *Law* or by *Shariah*). But, there is still no mechanism that can enforce either *Shariah* or state law to govern women rights.

In this group, all viewers come across as knowledgeable women with deeper understanding of the issues that women face in Pakistani society. More importantly, Respondent B raises the question of focusing on the 'right' addressee (that is men). Of course, gender-based content that highlights women issues has women as its major audiences/consumers. Those who are custodians of women under *Shariah* are men and those who have power over women under customs are men. To aim for a change would mean to include men in loop too.

A highly educated woman in this sample mentions:

Ishrat: It is the true picture of our society that women are treated with contempt even in educated households, they lack in opportunities as well. I have observed such a treatment very closely in society, and I was so frightened to get married because of this ugly reality. Even if wives share the same bedroom with their husbands, they are not treated with respect by their husbands, but they do bear such attitudes. Men should be educated on rights for mutual respect.

¹²⁶ Amin, A. (2013) HRCP says 'honour killings' on the rise in Pakistan, *The News*. Available at: <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-167333-HRCP-says-%20honour-killings%20-on-the-rise-in-Pakistan> (Accessed: August 4, 2014).

Bilquis: The first step in this direction can be that of stressing on education of women and making them aware of the law and their rights in it. This initiative can be taken through television, and yes, if women do not have access to education then they should be motivated enough to acquire certain skills, that can make them financially independent. And for this purpose, television should design special programmes for empowering women.

What seems to be a long exchange of thoughts on 'television's role in empowering women' is just a snippet from a conversation that lasted for at least an hour, and the response to what can be done to address the gender-based issues in Pakistani society is a single call from this group. Here, viewers suggest that 'tailor-made programmes for empowering women' can be helpful and treating the problem at the macro level by educating them rather than focussing on what appear to be trivia/personal stories. Whether it is really helpful for empowering women or not remains debatable, mainly because 'empowering or emancipation' is by nature so indefinite, collective ideal yet an individual project, that one can still not figure out what these women think about such a concept. Despite the fact that they are all educated, they still want to be dependent on male members of the family. Moreover, in the snippet above is Ishrat response who shares how she has seen educated households treat women unjustly. Similarly, another factor important in this regard, is whether 'empowering women' can be conceived as a collective ideal or whether it is a personal project. Yet again, what is an even more complicated question is: 'what is our reference for emancipation?' Is it the local culture, West or 'comprehensive regime of Islam'? Perhaps, it is more appropriate to think in terms of 'change', no matter how insignificant it may appear, for these viewers seem to be ready for opening up for some sort of change. Whether these

women recognise 'change' as something positive in society or not becomes debatable when these women go on to recall the time when they were young:

Nasreen: I don't think reporting can make us any safer. As far as I remember, we used to wear skimpy clothes when we were young in 1970s, and we used to walk back home from work in clothes that did not really conform to the Islamic standards for modest dressing, but we were a lot safer than our daughters. Now, our generations have more resources and more education but the society has become sexually repressed in many ways that women have become vulnerable to such threats. (Sohni Chalet 3)

The argument presented here raises a concern for how society has changed over the years with regards to its orientation towards sexuality. Is there a link between the rise in gender-based crimes and the rise in the tendencies that are fighting to 'repress/tame/regulate sexuality'? These viewers are highly educated and move in the public domain. Yet they feel that their daughters are vulnerable in the public domain. However, when I asked Farah and Alia if they would ever report such a crime on television or not, they replied:

Alia: If any such thing (like rape or sexual abuse) happens in our neighbourhood, the victim's family or even any of us wouldn't really bother to report, there is a lot at stake for the middle class families, and I think usually it is the lower class that reports a crime and aren't really afraid of their identity being disclosed. We think about our family's name, honour and consequences our children can face as a result of it.

Farah: There is a reason to it as well, if you talk to our domestic maids, who belong to that class where crimes are common, you would be shocked to find out that their value system is different than ours. You know, my maid's

husband has left her to live with his aunt, and they are moving freely in their family and social circle. As for the middle class, everything is so complicated, even to this day, marrying a divorcee or a widow is not taken with an open heart. (Sohni Chalet 4)

For the majority of viewers in this sample, such crimes do not belong to their class, and if anything does happen, they do not see themselves reporting. The lack of reporting in the middle class is also raised by Asim Naseer, the producer of *Shabbir Toh Dekhay Ga* (Shabbir will Watch). Sawera Nadeem also refer to the fact that her middle-class viewers do not seem ready to participate. (See Chapter, 6) When the respondent A argues that 'there is a lot at stake for the middle class', she is referring to the culture of silence and honour often termed as *safaid poshi* in Urdu.¹²⁷ Although viewers in the affluent middle class do acknowledge the importance of reporting crime, they still look at the crime stories as a window on the 'lives of lower class'. I notice that these viewers watch it 'as someone else's reality'. Class intervenes in their reading of this content. They also relate 'not reporting' and 'the absence of gender-based crime' as specific to their class. In a sense, they even seek pride in saying it. In such cases, issues take a backseat, while 'personal ordeals' are watched as the reality of one segment of society. This is directly linked to the culture of stratification in society, which is also divided on the basis of the issues that belong to a particular class. The culture of shame in the society is reinforced in/by the middle class more than it is practised in the lower middle class. It is no wonder that the respondent here mentions that 'such gender-based issues are common in the lower class, while for the middle class, power struggles within the home are of prime importance'. However, to relate it back to what it

¹²⁷ *Safaid Poshi* can be literally translated into 'wearing white'. It refers to the white collar people, more specifically the middle class mores that call for a protection of honour.

holds for the public of gender-based content, I argue that the variable of class also weakens the public as argued in Chapter 2. In order to conform to the ethos of their class (Middle Class), these viewers appear to sympathise more than they can empathise with the victims. This is another factor that makes gives rise to the internal diversity within the public for gendered content.

Nevertheless, crime shows do engage viewers to the level that they revisit their status as 'women' in society and also reflect upon the politico-legal culture that is so hostile towards women. Even in the sample of young university students, there is limited eagerness to watch crime shows. In fact, a few students suggested that a more helpful format in this regard would be:

Zenobia: Instead of crime watch, we need shows like *Geo Hina Kay Sath* and *Aurat Kahani*. (Stories of Women). We can still recall these two programmes which were committed to social awareness. These programmes were crucial in facilitating the cases enough to draw government's attention towards it or the legal process itself, but what happened thereafter is altogether another matter. (KU 5)

Samra: We do feel safer now. I used to watch *Geo Hina Kay Sath*, we badly need programmes of that sort. It was really an initiative to make us more aware as female citizens. It not only engaged us with the women-based issues, but also informed us about the laws that cater to our needs. So, there was a situation of bailout in the end, through which you could know about whom to contact and where to go to if any situation of crisis arises.

For Zenobia and Samra, the issue has to do with knowing about rights. Once again, Zenobia takes issue with representation of gendered issues on interactive shows and stresses the importance of knowing about rights. The question of rights is also related to the issue of cultural capital. The viewers in the middle

class are much more aware of the system and also more coherent about the areas in which they need more information. In case of gender-based content on television, they feel that they need to be provided more information regarding their rights. Interestingly, they want to have knowledge about their rights under the state law through interactive genres as well as drama serials. At the same time, these viewers want the media to facilitate the system on the ground. Although the viewers in the middle class expressed the distrust in the system and that may be one of the reasons for not participating in the shows, their expectation from the interactive shows are higher. This kind of engagement is somewhat between civic and political, where the desire is to know about laws and to 'influence governmental action' (Dahlgren, 2009:58).

Young students recognise the dimension of stress linked to the crime stories. One of them was reminded of such a story which speaks volumes regarding 'the security of women' in Pakistan:

Hania: Reporting in news is altogether a different thing but bringing these issues up in talk shows or re-enactment is something else, at least I disapprove of it. Do you think it would make a difference to victim's life? In fact, the trauma it leaves with the viewers is immense. After watching this exclusive programme about a case in which a man raped more than 50 female dead bodies, my mother remained disturbed for at least a week.

Javeria: There is so much wrong in this society and what we can really do about it, may be just report it. We should keep our problems to ourselves and solve it internally, rather than taking it to Oscars, and letting the entire world know about it. We are a crises-ridden country; there is one crisis after the other, so we should fix our problems without bringing them on to the channels watched abroad. (KU 1)

Unlike middle class housewives who disown gender-based crimes as practices exclusive to a certain class, these students of Karachi University only show concern regarding the levels of stress that such viewing nurtures and the consequences this content can have for the nation. However, these crime stories seem to be integrated into their lives and this content has even sparked 'a sense of concern' towards such issues which is rather evident. These respondents do speak about such crimes as 'their own problems', which must be addressed as an intra-state matter rather than a global issue, as treated by Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy. The concern for the image of the country at the global level is also evident here. It is something that disengages them with a cause, sparks more stress and brings defamation to the nation. Despite their criticism on the treatment of such issues, all viewers seem to engage with the urgency of the cause itself and also identify the areas in which a mechanism for cleaner accountability is needed.

Gender-based crimes might be reported, but the protection of identity becomes an issue bigger than the 'rape' itself. The 'stigma of rape' that a victim carries with her does not allow the family to reassimilate into the society. The respondent here is a mother of three young daughters who work in a factory, and for her the main concern is the protection of their *honour*, for they are in marriageable ages. However, something that comes up again and again, is the 'reputation of judiciary' in Pakistan. There are many cases still pending in courts including some high profile 'rape' cases that are unresolved to date. The factor of 'distrust' in the system emerges again and again in throughout this discussion. Although, a lot of these issues are deeply entrenched in the culture of *honour* and dignity of a family, but the silence on these issues is deeply rooted in the lack of confidence in the system or the distrust. As social citizens

as well as cultural citizens, viewers in this sample watch crime shows and stress the importance of reporting but the lack trust in the judiciary translates into either indifference or complete distrust.

7.5: Conclusion:

This chapter has dealt with the viewers' perspective on the genre's potential in bringing change. In terms of engagement with different genres, one cannot say that a particular genre is more engaging than another. In the case of drama serials, *Roag* seemed to have engaged women as social citizens. As for the young housewives, whether in the middle class or the lower middle class, the main interest was to know more about their rights for a nuclear home.

Although religion-based talk shows are used as a resource for knowledge on the rights of women in Islam, women still consider it to be a huge step to use spaces that are inherently public. Their public nature had a certain impact on these viewers, and barred them from accessing them. Further, any space that can fall into the category of public is approached through the lens of religion and that of culture. The question becomes whether it is acceptable within the culture as well as *Shariah* to approach a public medium. Interestingly, the engagement pattern with crime shows demonstrated that viewers not only follow these shows but also critically reflect upon the issues raised by gender-based crimes. The university students as well as middle-aged women in the affluent middle class expressed their interest in knowing more about their rights through interactive genres as well as through narrative forms. In this sense, all these genres offer some spaces and occasions for political possibilities. In their engagement with such gendered content, viewers question their position within home and marriage. Understanding of the term empowerment appears to vary according to age and religiosity, but seeking change tends to

translate into a transition from living in a joint family system to a nuclear family system. Women's reflection, in post-viewing discussions, on their roles and position within home and society demonstrates the start of a conversation on the status of women.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The thesis began with a claim that changes in gender-based television content have the potential to redefine the public/private distinction of Pakistani society. The importance of mapping this change in Pakistani television culture relates to the socio-political dynamics of the society. In a society, where a religious conservatism is on the rise, such change is a crucial step in re-shaping the traditional binary of public and private as defined within religious discourse. Whereas the latter undermines the capacity of women to have agency in the public sphere, television culture offers a space of possibility for political agency and access to public life. It potentially makes a counter-discourse possible, inviting women to rethink their collective status in the society and their position in the private sphere. Moreover, it also opens up discussion on the state of (repressed) sexuality in society and on how women (only) are highlighted as the repositories of honour for family, nation and *Ummah*. Bearing these potential dynamics in mind, the overarching research question raised for this study was: How and why has content in relation to gender changed, and how do women based in Karachi appropriate/understand this content?

In seeking answers to this question, the study focused on two distinct spheres of inquiry. The first explored the motivations and agenda of the producers – including creative workers and those on the business and selling side; the second sought to understand how urban women viewers – across age and class – made sense of changes. Adopting the method of interviews for producers and focus groups for viewers, this research offers some significant findings. Most striking perhaps is the manifestation of contradiction or rather, a series of contradictions,

broadly around the liberalisation of media on the one hand and rising conservatism in Pakistani society on the other.

One of the contradictions looks at how religion became a commodity in Pakistani television culture. Interest-driven economy has no concept in Islam, but it is interesting to see how capitalism and Islam work hand in hand to run the commercial media industry in Pakistan. As long as religious conservatism delivers ratings and generates revenue for all the stakeholders in the market, it does not seem to be an issue of radicalising the society. There is also a degree of contradiction within the policy of liberalisation as well. It may appear to be referring to a policy of openness or doing away from censorship and constraints in expression. However, it plays out in another form of censorship or even disciplining. Several watch dogs emerge to channelize the discourse and temper citizens in their own ways. Religion-based pressure groups are strongest of all the watch dogs that include PEMRA and other political parties. It seems that liberal media in Pakistan is deliberately creating clones of religiously inclined cultural subjects. It is not just in terms of Shariah compliant ideology that is being promoted through television in Pakistan, but clergy has also mellowed its stance to stay away from television. Now, we can see clerics who believe in strict segregation of sexes and spaces (public and private) in society to sit across female anchors and audiences and answer questions of private nature. In this way, clergy is also using media effectively to discipline women overtly and covertly.

Contradictions are manifest when, as convenient, viewers pick and choose between culture and religion and more specifically, when they seek to position themselves in relation to discussions about the joint family system versus the nuclear family system. Since, Islam protects married women's right to have a separate home, younger women are able to criticise the cultural tradition of joint family system with the backing of religion and yet this is also a proto-feminist

demand for 'autonomy' from their husband's family (like Farah and Hinozia in Chapter 7, p. 252); on which older women, who can/cannot afford to live on their own for financial and security reasons, do not acknowledge daughters-in-law's right for a separate home(see Chapter 7, p. 248).

Another contradiction emerged in the form of double standards in terms of appearance of women on screen. Even those who happen to be religiously inclined do not want to see women in an Islamic attire on screen, rather they prefer to see them dress in a cultural attire. In a similar vein, reporting crimes against women maybe a good move as long as it does not tarnish the image of the nation or Muslims. Moreover, none of the participants accepted to have watched gendered content for the sake of pleasure. Women in my sample were avid viewers of drama serials and other interactive genres, however, the culture of silence on what is pleasurable is so deep that no one accepted watching for pleasure or escape. Watching television for the sake of pleasure has no place in Islam, but it can be viewed as the source of knowledge on serious issues. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the study finds a majority of the viewers using the medium as a resource of knowledge on the state of affairs for women in the society.

8.1 Summary of the findings of the chapters:

The empirical findings start in **Chapter 4** which explains what viewers understand by the liberalisation of media and openness in gender-based content. Liberalisation/openness in terms of content is read by viewers in terms of losing modesty and abandoning *dupatta*. The middle-aged women like Tasneem and Husna in the affluent middle class do not seem to equate the trend of abandoning the *dupatta* with the loss of modesty (See Chapter 4, p. 111). However, the University students in the middle class sample, as well as the viewers in the lower

middle class, read the absence of *dupatta* from the screen as moral bankruptcy of the nation. In addition, women who are otherwise religious in the middle class sample do not seem to be affected by women appearing without religious attire (*abaya*). Their identities as Muslims take a backseat while reading such appearances of women; instead, they stress the importance of *dupatta* that is essentially a cultural piece of attire. *Dupatta*, in this discussion emerges as a signifier of modesty, shame and cultural pride.

Openness is also read in terms of its consequences for the home. For the women living in the affluent middle class, openness does not have the potential to alter the fabric of their homes. In the lower middle class, women seem to be more concerned about their immediate contexts. These women express concerns about how language intervenes with the etiquettes for the lounge, a space used for family viewing. The etiquettes and the appropriate language for the lounge directly relates to the viewers' sense of the public and the private with in home.

Lastly, openness is also linked to the taboos highlighted in Pakistani media culture. The middle-aged women (like Ghazala, see Chapter 4, p. 130) in the affluent middle class take the impersonal approach once again, in reading the representation of prostitution. The viewers in this sample argue for the necessity as well as the urgency in covering the issues facing the prostitutes in Pakistan. In the case of representation of the homosexuals, the same viewers argue that this issue does not seem relevant to the Pakistani society. In addition, they show concern over how such representation can lead to desensitising of the nation. The religiously inclined middle class also have concerns that exposure to such representations would make them norms. They comment on it as a distant reality but as knowledgeable social citizens. Viewers like Rukhsana and Almas (see

Chapter 4, p. 131) in the lower middle class express fear of their daughters being influenced by such content. However, these viewers relate prostitution to the economic deprivation in the society.

Chapter five aims to evaluate how producers of gender-based content understand the factors that facilitate the production of gender-based content. It comes to the fore that the anchors of the breakfast shows heavily rely on the ratings and they draw their perception of the viewers through the semi-predictable sample for the ratings. The anchors assign certain stereotypes to these viewers and stress that they are all passive housewives with no interest in contributing to the debates they generate in their shows. These anchors also express their superiority as more knowledgeable persons in comparison to their viewers, whom they think have lower IQ levels. At the same time, there is an implied craving for smart audiences who can engage and who should behave like the responsive members of the public.

The directors and the writers for the drama serials opine that their viewers are the women based in the urban areas but are completely separated from the public sphere. They also acknowledge the frustration they feel in producing for the semi-predictable audiences derived from the ratings' sample. This picture has another story to tell when taken up with the sales and marketing heads of the channels. The channel heads that seem to be committed to the laws of the market first, rather than the quality of the content stress the importance of the popular culture. By and large, all stress that popular genres not only hooks the consumers but also engages the lowest common denominator of the society.

The sections that follow discuss how *ratings* can have direct impact on the stress levels of those working in the industry. It also reveals that ethical considerations seem to be less important than concerns to draw more ratings when it comes to designing content. The case raised in this regard is the veiling and unveiling of the rape victims in the interactive shows and showing tragedy, morbidity and realism as the commodities to sell through the drama serials.

The last section evaluates if the producers consider media as an institution or a reflection of the public sphere. Those on the creative side of the production stress that the media should behave as an institution and it should also render a space for sharing of thoughts and debating on issues of common concern. However, they argue that the present state of television is far from the image of the public sphere. On the sales and marketing side of production, people argue that media are neither a pillar of the state nor are they non-governmental organisations that would render their services for the good of the society. Media are commercial enterprises committed to selling their products.

In the last two chapters, the study raises *the question of whether gender-based content can bring change any sort of change or not*. The initial claim is that this content can alter the public/private distinction of Pakistani society and can have some sort of impact in the immediate lives of the viewers. In this regard, **Chapter 6** looks into how producers relate the content to social change. For those involved in the production of drama serials, the opinion seems to oscillate between those who argue that there is a need to have inspiring roles of women on screen to bring any change and those who stress that reflecting the reality can also motivate the viewers to bring some change in their immediate life. The content heads for the drama serials in the four channels (Geo, ARY, Hum and Express) argue that

content cannot bring change in the attitudes of the people in society. They base this argument on the assumption that those who bring any change at the policy level or in terms of the protests (political mobilisation) on the streets do not watch drama serials.

The industry's most popular directors and writers who tend to write on issues within marriage and extended families question the idea of offering distorted realities to the viewers. They assert that there are cultural practices that discriminate against women that should be challenged on screen through the resolution in *Shariah*. In addition, it is argued that the idea of feminism is foreign to the Pakistani society, and that a typical liberal mindset is imposing their version of feminism.

With regards to empowering women, the hosts of the morning shows except for one are completely in line with each other in arguing that despite their efforts to engage with stories that need attention (bringing rape victims on shows), viewers, especially those in the middle class, do not seem to be engaged with the issues of social relevance. However, there is again a divide among these anchors in terms of how they understand the ideal status of women in the society. Three anchors argue that the question of empowering women is irrelevant and that the debates should focus on an equal status for all genders while the other two hosts who are popular in the lower middle class argue that women should be granted rights and should be protected for their subordinate position in the society. The idea is to preserve the traditionally assigned roles for women and stress for their rights in Islam.

The producers of the religion-based talk shows work with a clear agenda of bringing change through the teachings of Islam. Without displacing women from their home, the vision is clear that women should seek first-hand knowledge on how Islamic teachings pertain to their matters of concern. Moreover, they argue that religion-based talk shows have immense potential in changing the realities on the ground for women. Due to their preference for religion, these shows have the sanction of the entire community and these shows provide women with the licence to express themselves more forcefully.

Chapter seven in the thesis serves as an extension to Chapter six. It provides a detailed account on how viewers perceive the emancipatory trends in gender-based content. The discussion highlights how women engage with gender-based themes in the drama serials. Key themes are revisited repeatedly in the discussion: the issue of joint family system and how it influences domestic politics; the rights of women to divorce and *halala*; and the issue of child rape in relation to *Roag*. The viewers directly relate the representation of the joint family system to their own subjectivities. The middle-aged women (most of them mothers-in-law) argue that the representation of the notorious mothers-in-law is far from reality, and that daughters-in-law are treated well in the joint family systems. The middle-aged women (like Baji, see Chapter 7, p. 246) in the lower middle class argue that in households with limited income, the joint family is a blessing to hold the family together and make ends meet. However, the young viewers in all the income groups maintain that the joint family system is a curse in the society that operates against the agency of young women in the capacity of daughters-in-law.

In case of the rights of women for divorce, the middle-aged women in the affluent middle class appear to be less affected by the issue. The young viewers in all the other classes stress that such themes should be taken as a reminder to women about their vulnerable positions within marriage. The viewers of all classes engage at another level with the content in *Roag*. Viewers of all classes share their personal stories of paranoia after viewing this content; they even mention how they have taken steps in their immediate lives to protect the young ones. The university students resent such representations that reinforce the public/private distinctions.

In case of content on religion-based talk shows, the middle-aged women in the lower middle class mention that they may watch such shows but do not call on them for two reasons; first, they need to call with the permission of their *mehram*, second, they would ask their *mehram* on any religious issue of concern to them. Among the young daughters-in-law (like Farah, see Chapter 7, p. 273), the argument is that they would not call without the permission of their mothers-in-law. The religiously-inclined viewers opine that such shows address matters that belong to the private sphere and therefore it is not religiously permitted to disclose such matters on the public medium. This genre in particular offers an interesting debate on how viewers perceive 'private' for themselves. The religious spaces are used as a fora for information on issues of private nature, but this is done at the expense of other callers. Using the medium of telephone (private in nature) that can even anonymise their identities on live shows is not an option for these viewers mainly for two reasons; first, their commitment to religion (that prohibits them to access the public sphere) and family values make it unthinkable for these women, the second reason for not accessing is that these viewers assume that those who access such spaces belong to a class that is socially and economically deprived.

In the case of the crime and breakfast shows that bring victims of gender-based violence on screen and build a discussion around their plight, the viewers have different opinions on these shows. All the viewers are in favour of reporting on gender-based crime of any nature; however, they vary in the treatment of the content. They all agree that the victims' faces should not be shown on television for ethical reasons. The variation in the readings of these shows depends upon two factors, namely, class and religious inclination. Class is directly related to the level of education and the overall awareness on socio-political issues. Middle-aged women in the affluent middle-class argue that gender-based crimes should be reported in the news but not made the point of discussion in the breakfast shows and the crime shows. The idea is that the treatment of the crime stories fails to assign a social value to the issue; rather it creates fear of the outside world in the viewers. In addition, these viewers and the university students also argue that the media should take up the responsibility of informing viewers of the laws that protect women and should facilitate the system for the re-assimilation of the perpetrators. For the viewers in the lower middle class, the crime-based stories inform them about the dangers that lie in the society. For them, it raises questions such as whether women should really step out of their homes or not. It further reinforces the binary of the public/private distinction for them.

8.2: Revisiting the attributes of the public:

While evaluating attributes of the publics, the study has challenged the parameters of certain attributes. Following Warner (2002) and Dayan (2005), the concept of 'publics' is understood in terms of its five attributes, namely; performance, representativeness, reflexivity, autonomy, 'stranger-hood' and

subjectivity'. The first attribute taken from Dayan (2005) is that of performance, and I argue that performance can have two dimensions: one that involves direct participation and the other through distanced or remote participation. The idea that 'a public must go public or it is not a public' (Dayan, 2005: 52), did not play out in the same manner as in the case of Pakistan. I found out that intra-public divisions can lead to different levels of engagement with gendered content. On the basis of this engagement, the study contributes to the theoretical debate on what constitutes a public with two additional concepts called *dormant* publics and *constrained* publics, where *dormant* are those who do not have enough stimuli/motivation to perform as public, while *constrained* are those who are denied this access by family member or social pressures. Yet, the attribute of 'subjectivity' played out differently in Pakistani context. Instead of an affordability (as understood in Western concept), subjectivity in Pakistani context can translate into a limitation, a constraint that keeps women from participating in the mediated public sphere. However, that limitation or constraint can become a stimulus or motivation for a very few viewers to interact with the mediated public sphere.

Evaluating subjectivity in Pakistani context make the understanding of this attribute richer and offers a different insight into how subjectivity can vary with contexts. The study finds out that the willingness to participate depends on one's own subjectivity and it is also a class-issue. The subjectivity is directly tied to viewers' immediate contexts. The structure of the family and the role of religion potentially define their immediate contexts. For instance, women living in the joint family system find it difficult to directly participate in the discursive spaces of the talk shows without the consent of their mothers-in-law or in some cases to watch a programme with other family members in lounge. Those living in the religiously-inclined households cannot participate without the consent of their *mehram*. These viewers fall into the category of *constrained* public. Had there been

no pressure from the mothers-in-law and the *mehram*, these women would participate or engage at a higher level (or so it seems). The viewers who belong to the affluent middle-class do not demonstrate their willingness to participate; in fact, they take a conscious decision to distance themselves from such spaces. These viewers are part of the dormant public whose members do not find enough stimuli/motivation in the content to participate directly while their association to their class overcomes them. This dormant public can still transcend social pressures of class, if the motivation is greater than the pressure. But, they are all part of the public for the gendered content, albeit dormant or constrained.

The attribute of *representativeness* is seen in two senses, one that relates to re-presenting of the themes, and the other that relates to who represents women in gender-based talk shows. It is usually the victims of gender-based crimes who represent the voices of the marginalised and the oppressed communities. In case of representing the themes, the editorial policy is directly tied to what is popular among the viewers. The gatekeepers do not allow unconstrained access to all the issues related to gender. The producers explain how they work in an environment of heightened fear, therefore anything that directly challenges *Shariah* is either not given space on the mediated public sphere, or is pushed to the late night slots.

The third attribute in question is that of the *reflexive decision to join*. All those engaged in the discussion are members of the public of this content in one way or the other. The middle-aged women and the University students who distance themselves from the victims are also critically engaging with the issues but the distrust in the system emerges throughout these findings. In fact, for the women in the middle class, the issues that appear on television are seen as the tip of the iceberg. They can engage with these issues at another level, where they link gender-based crimes to the deeply rooted system of patriarchy, corruption in the system and the image of the country on a global level. The lower middle class

can relate to gender-based content at a personal level; their anxieties about the outside world, and their own subjective positions at home are similar to those represented on screen.

The fourth attribute is that of autonomy of the public. Initially, in the thesis, I argue that there is a possibility that gender-based content has only pronounced the already existing public facilitated by the other institutions, such as religion. The study finds that viewers cannot be understood as a homogenous public of gender-based content. Their viewing experiences are heavily influenced by their intersecting identities.

8.3: Revisiting popular culture and cultural citizenship:

I began with the argument that popular culture allows to revisit gender-based issues in an emotion-laden discourse. Following Lunt and Pantti (2009), Klein (2013), this study also finds that the emotion-laden rhetoric can engage a segment of society that is separated from the public life. Popular culture induces opportunities for cultural citizenship.

The argument that popular culture offers spaces for the performance of cultural citizenship is also explored in this study. It is found that there is a sense of being a member of a wider community of women who are oppressed in the society. The content gives the motivation to include them in the discourse on women-related issues and offers them spaces for reflecting on issues of socio-political nature. It also allows them to perform directly in the mediated public sphere without displacing women from home; this is a limited kind of access that does not openly challenge the binary laid under *Shariah*. Many viewers who do not want to seek advice on the issues of personal nature by telephone seem to be reluctant in approaching the experts in the interactive genres. These viewers do not want to open their own homes for scrutiny, especially those who are religiously inclined. Other peoples' personal life is political for them but not their

own, although it provides some resource for reflection over their own personal lives. Within these practices, viewers encounter several questions related to culture and identity.

In this regard, practices of cultural citizenship constantly push and pull the public/private distinction in the Pakistani society. For example, popular culture has certainly had impact on how this binary operates within the joint family systems. The lounge has become a space where the silence on gender-sensitive issues has ended. As cultural citizens, viewers have started thinking about their position in home or limits to their personal autonomy. Knowing that home is the pivot of woman's life, popular culture has invited women to think about power relations within home, hierarchical structure of home in Pakistan and their vulnerability in marriage. But, this can help open up society on basic rights of women, a right to have one's own space or a right to have divorce. I would argue that it is not any feminist movement in Pakistan, or current affairs-based talk shows (Cheema, 2014) that have raised the question of the right of a woman for a nuclear home, but popular culture that broke the silence on this issue.

At the stage of cultural citizenship, such questions may remain at a personal level, with a contestation of thoughts within their minds or their immediate context, but their importance cannot be undermined. This is why I also refer to it as 'at a pre-political' stage (Hermes, 2005: 77), where concerns about identity, society and culture emerge but at a personalised level. Referring back to Miller (1993), I also argue that viewers are also tempered as 'civic cultural subjects' to conform to *Shariah*, a higher discourse or authority in Pakistan. Their pre-political practices translate into finding solutions to their problem in Islam.

For altering the dynamics of the binary, the step has to come from within the dormant public of the gender-based-content. When their commitment to a feminist cause will overcome their loyalty to the family structure and religion, they will come forward to engage in pro-civic ways. Presently, they do appear to be reflecting in pro-civic ways but not ready take action. It also needs a push not only from the media but also from feminist movements. Popular culture at this level can at least help create a silent consensus on the necessity of questioning the status of women in Pakistan.

Despite the factors that seem to constrain the practices of the cultural citizenship, it can still be argued that the transition in the viewing experiences can only be witnessed in the last ten years. Over a period of time, the viewers may also climb the stages of engagement with the issues under consideration. The engagement patterns may not lead to immediate public action but they do have potential to make gender issues political. It also draws attention to the fact television is hugely relevant in the developing states. As Coleman (2013) reminds us, 'it would be a great mistake to imagine either that television is an obsolete medium or that its best features can be replicated online. In most countries television remains the main source of political information...' (25).

8.4 Revisiting the concept of the public sphere:

In this section, I revisit the concept of the feminist public sphere and recap how this study intervenes into the debates on the public sphere. Feminists such as Benhabib (1992) Landes (1998) and Fraser (1990) argue that ideally publics should arrive at a common good through discursive contestation and unconstrained discourse. The mediated public sphere in Pakistan allows limited spaces within the genre of drama serial for unconstrained discourse. In addition, interactive genres allow occasional space for unconstrained discourse on gender-based

issues. In stratified societies, the idea of the common good is also achieved through different routes. For example, it is not only about discursive contestation but also about the issues that are reported in the mainstream news and the frequency of their reporting. For instance, gender-based crimes such as rape and honour killings have become matters of common concern through their excessive coverage across different media and different genres, but *homosexuality or whether hijab is mandatory for women* has not. And when these discursive spaces are offered for deliberation on such matters, members of the public may choose not to participate in the mediated public sphere. This can even be a conscious decision.

The mediated public sphere in the Pakistani mainstream media can also be viewed as Fraser's comprehensive public sphere. It is a kind of national canvas on which this study has identified the emergence of the feminist public sphere. Based on the analysis of the content and findings of this research, I argue that this feminist public sphere should be read in terms of conservative feminist public sphere that is not democratic in its laws. Not all matters related to morality and sexuality can be debated freely in this public sphere, it operates through the logic of exclusion. That is, 'they can accommodate some expressive modes and not others' (Fraser, 1990: 69). In this way, mainstream public has created an 'Other' for itself or another liberal, subaltern public for a contesting discourse. This liberal subaltern public is struggling through different strategies to get space in the feminist public sphere. To argue it in another manner, my position is that the project of liberalisation of the media has been colonised not only by commercial motives but also by the religion-based pressure groups. All these stakeholders are using the television industry for their own good. As long as the interest of the religion-based pressure groups does not clash with the commercial interest of the media industry, they do not intervene with the freedom of expression. In this sense, freedom of expression has a defined scope or limitation; any expression or

issue that falls into either 'blasphemy' or contests the mainstream Islamic thought struggles to feature on television.

8.5 Revisiting methodology: Lessons learnt

Methodologically, the study allowed me to have proper insight into the production and reception of gender-based content. I planned to conduct this study in my hometown, Karachi. I used interviews and focus groups as main methods to this study. The first section of the research question, '*How and why has content in relation to gender changed*' was addressed through interviews of 42 producers. Reflecting back, I think 'interview' as a method was appropriate for getting an insight into producers' perspective into production of gendered content. It enabled me to find answer to the 'commodity question' in Pakistani context. Moreover, interviews were also useful in understanding the strategies of gatekeeping, editorial practices and agendas and motivations of producers within the mainstream public sphere.

Focus groups, on the other hand, turned out to be more appropriate for the latter part of the research question (*how women based in Karachi appropriate this content*). Focus groups were more effective in exploring viewing practices in relation to the attributes of the public of gendered content. It facilitated discussions in a way that female viewers reflected on gendered issues in relation to their intersecting identities. The homogeneity in focus groups (such as class, locality and age) also enabled viewers to share their pre-civic and pro-civic concerns on gender-based-issues. However, a factor that could also be rectified during the focus groups was that of 'removing an unwanted and dominating member from focus group'. For instance, due to the presence of mothers-in-law,

two of focus group suffered in terms quality of discussion. This could be directly related to how power dynamics operate at home.

However, I learnt several lessons in the process. The finding that audiences are neither passive nor can be reduced into a single category is also confirmed through this study. The sample of viewers chosen in this study reflect similarities in many ways; the viewers are residents of the same city, share the same ethnic origin, language, culture, and religion. Despite these similarities, they engage with the content at different levels and in different ways. In engaging with the content, their age, class, family structure (joint or nuclear), religious inclination, education and their identity as Muslims, Pakistanis and their gender plays a significant role.

Moreover, the place of viewing also intervenes with their viewing patterns. I conducted focus groups in five different neighbourhoods, two of which turned out to be difficult in terms of security. Reflecting back, I would say that a researcher should be more careful about the risks involved in conducting research in crime-prone areas. It was just not about the high crime rate in the area of Taiser Town and Korangi but also the fact that interviewees were not comfortable with my identity as a researcher from the West. I also faced similar issues in Karachi University, an institution where I have also studied. As soon as students realised that I study in the UK, they became sceptical of my intentions and treated me as an outsider. This factor may have tempered some of the responses (to a certain extent), whereby these students were a bit defensive in speaking on social issues.

In terms of interviewing, I realised that at times one sitting with an interviewee is not enough. In many cases, follow-up interviews on phone or another meeting turned out to be more productive. It also came to the fore that

interviewees tend to be more open about sensitive issues in the absence of recorder. In many cases digital recorder became obtrusive in many conversations but taking notes (using diary) was not. I also learnt that a researcher has to be flexible in his/her approach towards getting data. To begin with, my approach was a bit conservative in targeting those at the production end. Most of the people in my list were those working on higher posts such as, CEOs, Senior Producers, and Senior Writers. In the process, I realised that data could be obtained from writers, directors and producers working at all levels. In fact, it works better in terms of finding hidden agendas or motivations of producers.

At the culmination of the project, I am certain that the methods I chose were appropriate not only for my research question but also for my research sample. If this study was based in a rural area of Pakistan, I would have worked with interviews only. Focus groups would not have been effective in an area where the culture of shame is deeply entrenched. I think women would have preferred one-to-one conversation than discussing gender-based issues among four to six people.

8.6: Looking into the future:

I would also stress the importance of revisiting the project in a few years' time to explore whether viewers are found to be more engaged, or if viewers use sites of popular culture for actively pursuing cultural citizenship. In addition, the revisit can also assess if the feminist public sphere is more liberal than it is now. On the production side, the project could be re-examined to see if the reliance on ratings changes with time, perhaps with newer ways for measuring audience response. One can also look at how other media (such as mobile phones and internet technology) intersect with the etiquettes for lounge. Another direction could be to look at how women in rural areas are interacting with media and appropriating gender-based content. It will be interesting to explore how their

subjectivities allow or constrain them to engage with gendered content in Pakistani media cultures.

8.7 The project of emancipation for Pakistani women

At the culmination of this project, a relevant question is whether appropriation of gender-based content can facilitate any meaningful change in real life or not. My position in this regard is that, it depends upon multiple factors, such as, deliberate intention on part of the producers (as seen in case of *Tum Ho Kay Chup and Bol Meri Machli*); gravity of an issue (such as child rape that perhaps disturbs the motherly instinct); personal investment of the viewers; whether it speaks directly to their subjectivities; and a unanimous call for a cause across the genres. The issue of rape in a single genre may not be more effective in engaging with a single cause than a cause taken up on all genres (such as that of the Women Protection Bill and child rape). The issue needs to be served as a reminder from other genres as well, perhaps other media too.

With reference to change and emancipation, it also draws our attention to internal diversities within the public where diversity is deeply rooted in subjectivities. Being a member of the same gender is not enough in furthering the agenda of emancipation. In case of Pakistan and looking at the viewing sample for this project, I argue that the project of emancipation cannot be a project with a single vision and with similar end goals for all. The viewers for this project share the same ethnic background, city and language, but they vary in terms of class, family structures and religious inclinations. For women living in the joint family system, the emancipatory ideal is a home based on a nuclear family structure. For the middle-aged women, the emancipatory goal and gender-equality are struggles for others in the society. For the religiously inclined women, the emancipatory ideal is deeply rooted in the rights and duties of

women in Islam. However, for no one in the sample, is it about financial independence of the women. In other words, no one demands an end to dependency on *mehram*. It also lies in the fact that any project on change or emancipation begins with a realisation for a 'need for change'. That realisation comes with acknowledging one's own (individual or group) subjugated position within a society, ethnic group, class and religious community, and more importantly, in national discourses on female citizenship, religious and cultural discourses. In case of this project, religiously inclined women do not feel any urge because their emancipation lies in their dependency on their *mehram*. In any case, their sense of their 'own agency' is so heavily influenced by their own subjectivities that it seems they have settled for a compromise with their immediate contexts (particularly in cases of seeking consent for participating in live shows). These diverging interests/goals also warn us about essentialising the category of 'woman'.

Following Moghissi (2000), Fraser (1992), Mouffe (1995) Mohanty (1991) and Shaheed (2010), who came to a similar understanding in their own contexts, I also argue that there is no monolith category for 'Pakistani women'. As Shaheed rightly notes, 'they are divided by class and privilege and distinguished by culture, upbringing, personal experiences and life choices, to name but a few differences. They don't think alike. And, while the majority may feel unable to participate in resistance, a significant number of women actually subscribe to the views of religiously defined groups and are active proponents of these views' (2010: 865). Therefore, to conceive of a single political project for 'women' is a difficult task. It seems that emancipation can be a collective concern, but is realised individually through experiential standpoint. Nevertheless, there are areas of shared common interest where citizenship can 'be rethought not merely in terms of equal rights but in terms of human rights' (as noted by Rouse, 2004:

71, in her study on *Discourses on Gender in Pakistan*). These issues of common concern can be such crimes against children and women that may not have any place in humanity and religion. Although commercially driven, the mediated public sphere in Pakistan allows occasional spaces to highlight these areas of common concern (customs such as *karo kari* or rape of children), where at least liberals and religiously-inclined people can deliberate upon issues of common concern. However, issues such as *stoning* will remain debatable for years to come in a society where religious extremism (*Talibanisation*) is increasing by the day.

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Friendskorner.com

Appendix 1

Focus Groups

Please note that these questions were only used as topic guides.

Introductory Questions: (Female Viewers)

1. What kind of everyday media consumption do you have?
2. What media you use at different times of day. (Radio, Newspapers, TV)
3. What kinds of media you would make appointments for?
4. What do you watch with other family members?
5. What kind of television programmes do you watch?
6. Which one you would never miss and which ones you would never watch and why?
7. Which genre you enjoy the most?

Questions about transition in media:

1. Have you noticed any changes in television programming in the last decade?
Do you think television programming has evolved in ten years? If yes, how?
2. What differences can you see between the state television of 1990s and the private television productions of today?
3. What was your take on the *dupatta policy* in 1990s and what is your response to the liberal appearance of women on Pakistani television?
4. Can you comment on the ways in which the gender-related content in particular has evolved? By that, I mean how themes, appearance and diction, have changed over the years?

In case of drama serials:

1. Why do you watch drama serials?
2. What do you think about the themes highlighted in the drama serials?
3. Do you think these narratives are telling us something about our society or are these entirely fictional?
4. Can you relate to these narratives, if yes, in what ways?
5. What do you think about the liberal as well as the conservative representations of the women in these serials?
6. Do you think issues such as *halala*, *incest*, *child marriage* and *rape* should be raised in drama serials?
7. Do you have any reservations on these themes or the representation of women in serials?
8. Is there anything that you can take away from these drama serials?
9. Have drama serials influenced your lives in any way? If yes, how? If not, why?

Specific Questions related to Begum Nawazish Ali:

1. What is your take on the portrayal of Begum Nawazish Ali (cross-dressing man) and other queer representations in drama serials and talk shows?
2. How would you respond to her attitude of Begum towards her guests?
3. Would you allow equal liberty with words to any female anchor on a celebrity talk show or not?

Gender-based talk shows:

1. What do you think about the interactive programmes?
2. Are you a regular viewer of *Alim aur Aalam/Aurat Kahani*?
3. If yes, why do you watch such shows? If not, why not?
4. Do you think these programmes (gender-based/religion-based) talk shows have benefitted women in anyway?
5. If yes, in what ways? If no, then why?
6. What do you think about the issues raised in these shows?

7. What do you think about the callers of these shows who take part in the discussions?
8. Have you ever called on these shows, if you have what was it for and if you may consider calling in future what would it be for? OR Would you ever call on such platforms to seek live counselling? If yes, what sort of counselling would you look for (i.e. Islamic, legal or emotional)?
9. Would you contact with an approval from the male member of your house or would he contact on your behalf? Also, do you face resistance from the family for interacting with such talk shows/or even watching them?
10. If yes, why would you prefer television over a local *madrassa* (for an Islamic Scholar) or an NGO (legal advisors)?
11. If no, why wouldn't you?
12. What do you think about the cases (gender victims) who come on these shows?
13. Do you think they have made the right decision to approach the media for their personal issues?
14. What do think about the role/interests of the producers in representing the victims?
15. Would you ever take your private matter to the interactive programmes, if yes, with what intention?
16. In what ways, do you think interactive television has influenced our daily lives?
17. Do you think you are a better informed person and socially more aware watching these shows?

Breakfast Show (Case study: Morning with Maya):

1. Do you watch breakfast shows?
2. Why do you watch them?
3. What is it about the breakfast shows you like the most?
4. Do you think you can relate to the topics taken up in breakfast shows?
5. What is it about *Morning with Maya* (my case study) that you like the most?

6. What do you think about the issues raised in Maya's shows?
7. As opposed to other breakfast shows, this show in particular brings victims of domestic violence on the show; what is your take on the intentions of the producers in bringing such issues to the fore?
8. What do you think about the women (victims of domestic violence) who come on her show? Do you think it is a wise decision to approach the platform offered by the breakfast shows to seek protection?
9. Has this show affected you in anyway? **OR** What have you taken away from this show?

Ending Questions:

1. If you were to change something/anything about the gendered-content what would that be?
2. What do you think about the overall representation of women?
3. What is your take on the role of the television in influencing women's lives?
4. Do you think any of the programmes discussed have an agenda to empower women?
5. Do you think, television can play any role in changing women lives?
6. Is there any topic that you think we should have touched upon?

Appendix 2

Interviews (General Question to all the producers)

All interviews started with some general questions about the field, and how interviewees got into the profession. Following is the broad guide to the questions. For each interviewee, I had to prepare in advance, watch their work, and then ask specific questions about their projects.

1. Could you please say something about how television in Pakistan has evolved in the last ten years?
2. Knowing that you have also worked for Pakistan Television Corporation, what in your opinion are the major differences in production between now and then?
3. What factors have actually caused this liberalisation (privatisation) of the media?
4. What has actually caused the change in the gendered content?
5. How do you identify this change?
6. Are your productions cause-driven?
7. As explicit as it is in your productions, are you really committed to the women's emancipation? If yes, why?
8. What is it about the society that you want to change in relation to gender?
9. Who is watching? Whom are you producing for?
10. Do you think people like the changed version of the gendered content? If yes, why? If no, why? How do you know about their likes and dislikes?

11. What other factors drive your content, e.g audience ratings as well as need of the market (I did not mention it explicitly that I want to know about ratings).
12. Are you faring well in terms of ratings?

Some specific questions to the producers of the drama serials:

1. The drama serials have particularly evolved over the last ten years. How would you differentiate the narratives of now and then (in times of PTV)?
2. What factors have mainly contributed to this change?
3. What kind of ideological narratives do your drama serials offer?
4. What sorts of motivations drive you to produce storylines that are in tension with cultural and religious practices? **OR**
5. Why do you want to raise issues such as, *halala*, child rape, incest, marriage to *Quran*, in your serials?
6. Why do you ask for the public poll for the 'ending' of any serial? Do audiences actively take part?
7. What factors determine such storylines/themes in drama serials? To what extent are these storylines based on popular demand?
8. What sort of responses you do get from the audiences through emails, phone calls and text messaging?
9. Can I access the electronic feedback on certain drama serials that you have received from the audiences? Only if you allow, I will not be using them in my thesis? (I raised this question, but there was no issue as issues, rather I was given to all the documentary evidence).
10. Are you satisfied with the media policy of the government (especially in relation to the gendered content)?
11. In a climate of increasing religious extremism increasing, have you faced any threats/resistance from the extremist (read: *Talibani*) organisations for the production of emancipatory (also open) content?

Specific Questions for the producers of interactive formats: Please note that the interactive programmes are divided into three categories, breakfast shows, gender-based talk shows and religion based talk shows. Therefore following 8 questions are the general questions for producers of all the interactive formats, which are followed by the case-studies' specific questions.

1. Live and interactive formats are relatively new to the Pakistani television. Why have you introduced this format?
2. Why do you think it is important to raise gender-based issues through these talk shows?
3. Do you think you are offering some sort of service to the society?
4. In your opinion, how well are such programmes received among the audiences?
5. How do you trace the victims who appear on your shows? Or, do they approach you?
6. Are you coordinating with some non-governmental organisations?
7. Do you think the new television culture in Pakistan is doing enough for the awareness of women's rights in Pakistan?

Questions for producers of gender-based talk shows:

A. Case studies: Breakfast with Maya/ Madadgar/Hawa ki Beti/Geo Hina kay Sath:

1. Unlike other shows, your show is committed towards highlighting the domestic issues faced by Pakistani women. Why do you highlight such themes?
2. How do victims of domestic violence approach you?
3. Are you working in collaboration with any NGOs?
4. What sort of protection do you provide to these victims?

5. In terms of rating, are you faring well?
6. Do you think/hope you are offering some service to the society?
7. Have you faced any resistance from the victims' families or any other pressure groups?

B. Aalim aur Aalam (Religion-based talk shows):

1. Interactive programmes for religion is a new trend for Pakistani viewers. How do you think it has benefited the society as a whole and women in particular?
2. Knowing that the orthodox interpretation of Islam does not allow women to access the public domain without a male intermediary (*mahram*), don't you think your format is in tension with traditional Islam? Have you faced resistance from radical Islamic groups?
3. The issues raised in your programme are mainly female oriented, why do you not invite female panellists on your show?

APPENDIX 3: CASE STUDIES

A. DRAMA SERIALS:

- The issue raised in *Anokha Bandhan* was that of *incest* and how women in rural areas can be tricked into marrying an under-aged boy. My prime reason for choosing this drama serial was that it was the first time in the history of Pakistani television that the issue of incest was raised in the genre of drama serials.
- In case of *Bol Meri Machli*, the story revolved around three sisters from a conservative background who had fallen prey to the notorious world the moment they stepped into the public sphere. This serial was chosen for two reason: firstly, it reinforced the idea that the outside world was a dangerous place for these women and that they had to compromise on their moral values the moment they stepped out of their home. Secondly, it highlighted the issue of adultery. The eldest of the three sisters committed adultery with a poet she was in love with. As one of the first serials to show adultery, this serial led to on-street protests by the viewers on its objectionable content.
- *Dil Hae Chota Sa* was the serial that raised the issue of *halala*. The misuse of the practice of *halala* is highlighted in this serial. However, in the recent years, *halala* became a popular theme for the drama serials. For example, during the fieldwork, viewers also mentioned the serial *Jannat Say Nikali Hui Aurat* as another popular serial on the same theme.

- *Jannat Say Nikali Hui Aurat*, was based on the life of a woman whose husband divorced her after 30 years of marriage. The divorce took place after a heated conversation (over kids) between the husband and the wife. Husband gave divorce to the wife, uttering the words 'I give you divorce' three times. According to the Hanafi School in Islam, divorce becomes effective, if a husband pronounces the word 'divorce' three times (for more information on Divorce in Hanafi School, please refer: sunniforum.com), whether under the influence of drug, anger or even a joke. This drama serial in particular raised the issue 'vulnerability of marriage', how it can affect lives of people around, especially of the woman who is divorced.
- The issue of joint family system and how women as daughters-in-law struggle to find their place within such family structure is one of the most popular themes in the Pakistani drama culture. In *Qaid-e-Tanhai*, the story revolved around a woman whose husband had migrated to the West for work. The protagonist was left behind to look after her in-laws. She faced all sorts of discrimination at home and her morality was also questioned. With years-long separation, this woman was even denied of all her sexual rights, while her husband married another woman.
- The issue of burying women alive had been taken up as an issue in *Tum Ho Kay Chup*. This drama serial was based on an actual case in the province of Baluchistan where a sitting minister ordered to bury five women alive. This order was taken by tribal jury called *Jirga*. This serial also led to the threats to the producer and also online protests on Face book and other forum. The Baluchi people protested against essentialising an entire stock of people living in Baluchistan. In this drama serial, a woman raised in the West was married into a Baluchi tribe where she was completely barred from accessing the public sphere. Her mother-in-law (who is also an outsider to this culture) helps her

daughter-in-law to escape the house. As a result, the mother-in-law who stood against the system is buried alive, however, her daughter-in-law manages to escape and returns back to London.

- *Roag*, was the first drama serial that highlights the issue of rape of a girl child in a middle-class household based in Hyderabad (one of cities in Sindh). What made it different from other issues of rape is that it raises a possibility of such a crime in an urban middle-class household.

These case studies gave the closest representation of the gender-based issues in Pakistani society. The issues in the five case studies include: incest, *halala*, adultery, domestic politics/living in the joint family system and the honour killing. The viewers spoke on these issues, but also referred to other serials that were running at the time of the fieldwork (though the gender-based issues did not seem to have changed). These include, *Jannat Say Nikali Hui Aurat*, *Behkawa*, *Meri Zaat Zarra-e-Baynishaan* and *Roag* in particular.

Appendix 4

List of Interviewees

A. Writers

1. Haseena Moin
2. Seema Ghazal
3. Bushra Ansari
4. Fasih Bari Khan
5. Khalid Ahmed
6. Umera Ahmed
7. Kifayat Rudini

B. Producers/directors

1. Ali Rizvi
2. Kazim Pasha
3. Ayub Khawar
4. Syed Ali Raza
5. Baber Javed
6. Sina Pasha
7. Saifi Hasan
8. Rashid Sami
9. Nabeel

C. CEOs of three production giants

1. Sajjad Gul (Evernew Productions)
2. Baber Javed (A n B Productions)
3. Hasan Soomro –Media City Production

D. Content Heads in four different channels

1. Ali Moin (Express Ent)
2. Ali Imran (ARY)
3. Enver Sajjad (GEO)
4. Maimoona Siddiqui (Hum)

E. Heads of three most popular television channels

1. Sultana Siddiqui, (Hum)
2. Imran Aslam, (GEO)
3. Badar Ikram (GEO)

F. Sales/Marketing Heads of these three channels

1. Arif Hussain, (Head of Sales and Finance, Hum)
2. Faisal Tammana (Sale Head, ARY)
3. Fawwad Azeem (Senior Marketing Manager, Geo)
4. Agha Fasiullah (Senior Marketing Manager Hum)

G. Producers three top-rated gender-based talk shows in Pakistan

1. Amir Liaquat
2. Maria Khan
3. Hina Khwaja Bayaat

H. Producers of these crime shows

1. Asim naseer, (Express Ent)
2. Anees Mansoori (ARY)

I. Six hosts of breakfast shows of different channels

1. Shaista wahidi (Geo)
2. Nida yasir (ARY)
3. Maya Khan (Samaa)
4. Faisal Qureishi (TV One)
5. Sawaira Nadeem (Aaj TV)

J. CEO of Media Logic

1. Nauman Fazal

K. Research Manager

1. Hammad Khan (Geo)

Appendix 5

Small questionnaire

Name:

Age:

Marital Status

Family Structure

Location

Group Number

Respondent (eg. A-F)

1. What kind of media consumption do you have?

Print, TV, Radio and Digest

2. Do you watch any show leaving housework or any other responsibility (studying for students)? If yes, which show?
3. Where do you watch TV (lounge or bedroom)?
4. Do you watch TV with other members of the family?
5. If watching with other members of the family, who has control over the remote in the prime time?

Please note: Brief questionnaire for all the members of the focus groups. This questionnaire helped me understand their responses better, and it was used to keep record of all the audio files.